

## CHAPTER VI

### CONSOLATIONS AND DRYNESS

ONE of the most common and deplorable illusions consists in judging of our prayer by the consolation or dryness we meet with therein ; in thinking it good because accompanied by consolation, bad, if chilled by desolation. No, no, such is not the case. The best prayer, were it ever so dry, is that which leaves us more humble, more disposed to renounce ourselves, to practise obedience, to live the life of dependence which our state requires, to bear with our brethren, and never to be a burthen to others ; in a word, to do in all things the will of God. On the other hand, our prayer, were it an ocean of sweetness, is barren and even baneful when it leaves us more full of ourselves, more attached to our consolations ; for our end here below is not enjoyment, but ever to tend to perfection.

Since consolations and aridities may serve or injure us according to the use we make of them, let us examine then what they are, whence they come, whither they tend, and how we are to make use of them. We will here speak chiefly of the consolations and aridities which are met with in ordinary prayer, as we mean to give later on an explanation of the passive purifications and the joys of mystical contemplation.

## § I.—THEIR NATURE.

Devotion is the promptitude with which the will tends to the service of God, to prayer as well as to other duties. The whole substance and marrow of devotion consists in this promptitude, quickness, agility, holy ardour, generosity, and devotedness of the will. With this disposition of soul we possess the essence of devotion; without it we have only its phantom; and this is why this readiness of will is called substantial devotion.

Generally speaking, it is seasoned with a certain charm and sweetness; we tend with love and keen relish to the things of God, we are well with Him; the soul is in peace, the heart joyful, and duty is easy. This sweetness is not devotion; for, without it, the will may be prompt in the service of God; but being superadded to devotion as accident to substance, it is called accidental devotion.

If it remain in the soul without passing into the senses, we have accidental spiritual devotion; if it spread from the soul to the senses like the overflow of a vessel which is too full, we then have accidental sensible devotion, or, to express it more concisely, sensible devotion. Then the heart is dilated with joy, and beats with more life, the eyes glisten and moisten with tears, the face is radiant, the voice full of emotion, all the senses filled with sweet impressions. And this sometimes reaches even to a kind of transport and of spiritual inebriation.

Sometimes, on the other hand, although the will

does its duty with generosity, the senses are not affected, the soul is not pervaded by this sweetness, it feels itself abandoned; the mind is empty and has no ideas, the heart is cold and conceives only affections without relish, and the will remains without energy. This is aridity, dryness, abandonment, desolation.

According to St. Liguori, says Fr. Desurmont,<sup>1</sup> "there are three kinds of ordinary mental prayer. The first is *easy prayer*, in which the soul, aided by grace, produces (at least with ease, and sometimes with sweetness) the various acts peculiar to conversation with God. The second is *dry prayer*, during which the soul can only make petitions, and humble and resign itself. The third is the *prayer of desolation*, in which the soul can hardly do more than utter a cry of alarm."

According to this teaching, then, consolations are not devotion; for the prompt will, which is the essence of devotion, may very well subsist without consolations, or be altogether wanting in spite of their presence.

St. Francis of Sales<sup>2</sup> gives as an example a child who weeps tenderly on seeing its mother bled, but none the less refuses to give her the apple it holds in its hand; so some souls experience great tenderness of heart, utter sighs, and shed tears when meditating on the Passion, but will not sacrifice to Our Lord some trifling affection, delight, or

<sup>1</sup> *The Divine Art of Mental Prayer.*

<sup>2</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Devout Life*, part iv., c. xiii.

satisfaction, which He wishes to take from them." Such persons have, indeed, some feelings, but they have no devotedness; their sensibility alone is touched, their will is not devoted to God. "Ah! all that is only children's friendship, tender indeed, but weak, fanciful and without effect. Devotion, therefore, does not consist in these tender feelings and sensible affections."

On the other hand, dryness does not always prove a want of devotion. Certainly, if the will faces its duty feebly, if it has become cowardly and without energy with regard to obedience, mutual forbearance, humiliations, &c.; if in time of prayer it makes hardly any effort against distractions, and does itself no violence to keep united to God; the soul has lost not only the sweetness of devotion but devotion itself. But if the will remains prompt and generous in fulfilling its duties, if, in prayer, *it does what it can* to remain united to God, even though it may hardly succeed in so doing, the soul has lost only sensible devotion, but has preserved substantial devotion, and has not ceased to belong to God and to please Him.

## § II.—THE ORIGIN AND TENDENCY OF CONSOLATIONS AND DESOLATIONS.

Consolations and desolations may come from God, from nature, or from the demon.

1°. In order to attract the soul to spiritual goods, God at first feeds it with the milk of interior con-

solations, with an abundance of happy tears. This is not a proof that the soul is strong and devout, but rather that it is weak, since God treats it as a child; it is God, who is good, and not ourselves. He lavishes upon us His consolations and caresses us to the end that those higher joys may banish from our mind the coarse delights of this earth, that our heart may be won by His goodness, and that we may lovingly embrace His will by our obedience and fidelity. But, alas! these bounties of God inspire us with a secret self-complacency, which is displeasing to Him, and we seize upon these spiritual sweets with a greediness which St. John of the Cross calls spiritual gluttony, so that "we seek the consolations of God as much and perhaps more than we do the God of consolations; and, if this sweetness were separable from love, we would abandon love to keep the sweetness."<sup>1</sup> Hence it is that, as soon as we are capable of supporting the withdrawal of these consolations, without abandoning virtue, God takes them from us, because we make a bad use of them.

He withdraws them, because we have failed to employ them in producing those fruits of virtue and self-sacrifice which He expected from our use of them.

He withdraws them, because we have been negligent in receiving them, and so when we get up to gather the manna, behold, it is melted away!

He withdraws them because we cannot at the

<sup>1</sup> St. Francis of Sales, *Love of God*, b. ix. c. x.

same time enjoy earthly and heavenly delights. The seeking of our own satisfaction, disorderly attachment to creatures, deliberate venial sin, and especially a habit of such sins, effectually dry up devotion.

He withdraws them, adds St. Bernard, on account of our pride; whether it be that we have already fallen into this vice, or that we should, without this withdrawal, fall into it. "The taking away of grace, is a proof of pride. . . . Pride, either already existing in the soul, or to be apprehended in the future, is always a cause of the withdrawal of grace." <sup>1</sup>

According to Fr. Faber, "the time of prayer is God's time for punishing us for our faults. Then it is that our venial sins, our slight infidelities, our inordinate friendships, our worldly attachments rise up against us, and we must pay the penalty of them." <sup>2</sup> It would perhaps be more exact to say that God awaits us there in order to admonish us of our faults, to correct us like a father, and to bring us back to our duty.

In short, then, by sending us dryness, God means to humble us, to detach us from creatures, to complete the purification of our soul, to lead us to a better appreciation of His gifts, to a more ardent desire of them, and to a greater readiness to make sacrifices in order to seek them. It is one of the ways, one of the artifices of God's love to make

<sup>1</sup> St. Bernard, *In cant. serm.*, 54, n<sup>o</sup> 10.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, xv.

Himself loved, to unite Himself more closely with a soul hungering and panting with the desire of Him, and to make it, in the meantime, practise more heroic and more meritorious acts of virtue.

2<sup>o</sup>. The demon has no power to enter directly into our intellect and will, but he can exert a great influence over the blood, the humours, the nerves, the imagination, and the senses. Sometimes he excites in us feelings of sweetness and consolation; he thus urges the soul to indiscretion in austere practices, in order to render it useless by ruining its health, or to drive it later on into discouragement, by the fatigue caused by a burden which is too heavy; he entices it to take a secret complacence in its own virtue, or to conceive an inordinate love of these spiritual sweets. Whilst engaging her in this treacherous game, he hides from the soul defects and faults which stand in much need of correction; he tries to persuade her that she is remarked and admired; he urges her to desire supernatural favours that may set her on a pedestal of honor; he seeks, in a word, to throw her into pride and sentimentalism, at the expense of true spiritual progress, which is ever solidly based on humility and abnegation.

Sometimes again the demon creates dryness in the soul to cause disunion between her and God, and that too, in prayer itself, whose end is to foster divine union. He fatigues the mind by a multitude of impertinent thoughts; he aggravates the apparent sterility of her prayer by temptations of all sorts; he overwhelms the sufferer with sleep, sadness, vexation; he suggests abominable

thoughts; he hopes that the soul will be lost by consenting to evil, or at least be discouraged. Can God hear a prayer so ill made? Is it not a mockery to multiply acts of faith, love, and such like, when it seems to us that we believe in nothing, and that our heart is frozen? Instead of accepting our prayer shall not God be rather offended by it? Is it worth while taking so much trouble to arrive at nothing but committing sins even in prayer? Then, if God sends us neither light nor devotion, is it not because He is indifferent, irritated, implacable? We serve Him so ill! we don't even know how to pray! &c. In short, the demon wishes to make us abandon prayer, or to render it sterile; and for this object the attraction of pleasure, the fear of difficulties, presumption, or despair—anything at all will suit his purpose—provided only that he can separate the soul from God and make us partakers of his own lot, which is banishment from heaven and eternal torments.

Often the demon insinuates himself into the consolations given by God, in order to turn these latter from their end; and into the desolations sent by God, in order to drive us into discouragement. And in these cases we must co-operate with the divine action, and combat the diabolical temptation.

3°. Consolations and desolations may also come from our own nature.

When fatigue and pre-occupations are not overwhelming us, when our body is full of vigour and health, when we have the head clear and the heart content, prayer easily abounds in consolations.



There are also some sensitive and impressionable natures whose emotions are aroused by a mere nothing. When they consider the benefits, mercies, and perfections of God, or the mysteries of our Saviour's life and death, especially on feast days, their hearts are full of love and their tears flow readily.

On the other hand, there are days when nature is weighed down by fatigue, sufferings, and cares; when the mind is empty, the heart insensible, the eyes dry, and the whole soul without life; then prayer becomes a painful labour, if we try to undertake the task.

Given the corruption of nature, our soul, in these alternations of sadness and joy, is accessible at one time to the demon of vain complacency and spiritual gluttony, at another to the demon of discouragement; but God is there, and we can always resist and gain the victory.

By the above signs it may be seen whence come our consolations and desolations. To throw more light, however, on this subject let us add a few words from St. Francis of Sales.<sup>1</sup> "Since there are sensible consolations which are good, and come from God, and yet others which are useless, dangerous, and even pernicious, coming from nature, or even from the enemy, how can I distinguish them from each other, so as to know the bad or useless from the good? The general teaching, my dear Philothea, concerning our affections

<sup>1</sup> St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 4th part, c. xiv.

and passions is that we are to know them by their fruit. . . . If sweetness, tenderness, and consolations render us more humble, patient, tractable, charitable, and compassionate with regard to our neighbour, more fervent in mortifying our concupiscence and evil inclinations, more constant in our pious exercises, more manageable and pliable in the hands of those to whom we owe obedience, more simple in our conduct, there is no doubt, Philothea, but that they come from God. But if these sweets have sweetness only for ourselves, and if they render us curious, bitter, punctilious, impatient, obstinate, haughty, presumptuous, harsh towards our neighbour, and if, thinking ourselves already little saints, we are no longer willing to be subject to direction or correction, indubitably they are false and pernicious consolations. (And by these same principles we must also form our judgment of aridities.) A good tree produces only good fruits.”

### § III.—PRACTICAL CONDUCT.

*On the part of the intelligence.*—1<sup>o</sup>. Let us commence by examining our conscience by the light of these principles, in order to see whence come our consolations and desolations, and especially what effects they produce in our souls. “But remark, Philothea,” says St. Francis of Sales,<sup>1</sup> “that we must not make this examination with inquietude

<sup>1</sup> St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 4th part, c. xiv.

and too much curiosity. After having carefully considered our excesses in this respect, if we find the cause of the evil in ourselves, we ought to thank God for the discovery; for the evil is half cured when we have discovered its cause. If, on the contrary, you find nothing in particular which seems to have caused this aridity, don't amuse yourself seeking it out more curiously, but with all simplicity and without further examining into particulars, do what I will tell you."

2°. First of all, we must, if necessary, set right our ideas about consolations and desolations. Even though they should be the fruit of nature or an artifice of the demon, both may still be very useful to us if we only know how to make a right use of them; which is, to use consolations in order to unite ourselves with God, and desolations, to detach ourselves from everything, and especially from ourselves. Though they be the work of God, they will injure us, if we turn them away from their end; the former, in order to nourish our pride and spiritual greed, the latter so as to become discouraged, and to abandon God and prayer. Consolations are not substantial devotion, nor do desolations constitute the want of it; both are, in the designs of God, powerful means of sanctification. It is only through nature's depravity and Satan's malice that they become rocks on which we may founder.

*On the part of the will.*—There are three things to be done:—To resign ourselves with confidence; to avoid dangers; to correspond with the designs of God.

1°. Whether we are in consolation or in desolation, let us submit ourselves with confidence to God's treatment. According to an expression of St. Francis of Sales, we must accept everything without fear from the hand of God, whether from the right hand or from the left; from the right consolations, from the left desolations; for God, like a father, as loving as He is wise, always intends our greater good.

"Far from rejecting divine consolations," says St. Liguori,<sup>1</sup> "as some false mystics maintained we ought to do, let us receive them with gratitude, without, however, stopping to enjoy them or to take complacence in them. . . . These spiritual consolations are gifts far more precious than all the riches and honours of this world." If our sensitive nature itself is affected this perfects our devotion, since then our whole being tastes God and is united to Him; our sensitive nature is to be feared when it leads us away from our duty; but it is right well regulated when it aids us to accomplish better the Divine Will.

A person may pray for consolations, provided he do so with a right intention and humble submission; but, in our opinion, it is better to leave ourselves with confidence in the hands of God, who is love itself and wisdom infallible, and to keep ourselves detached from those sweets, ready for sacrifice, and resolved to draw profit from every condition.

Likewise, in desolation, a person may ask with

<sup>1</sup> St. Liguori, *The Love of Jesus Christ*, xv.

humility and submission that this bitter chalice may pass away; but, for our part, we prefer a trustful and filial abandonment to divine Providence. "Invoke God," says St. Francis of Sales,<sup>1</sup> "and beg of Him to impart to you His gladness. . . . Away, then, O barren north wind, that driest up my soul! and come ye sweet and gracious breezes of consolation and breathe upon the garden of my heart! . . . After all, in such dryness and sterility nothing is so profitable, nothing so fruitful, as not to cling or be attached to our desire of being delivered from it. I do not say that we may not wish for deliverance, but I do say that we ought not to set our heart upon it; but rather to yield ourselves up to the pure mercy and special Providence of God, that He may make use of us as long as He pleases, . . . saying with our whole heart and a profound resignation; 'The Lord gave me consolations, the Lord hath taken them away; blessed be His holy Name.'<sup>2</sup> For, if we persevere in this humility, He will restore us His delightful favours as He did to Job."

2°. *Let us avoid the dangers.*—In consolations beware of pride.

God attracts us by His loving kindness, He forgets all our past offences, our present weakness, to see only our needs and His own love; this is why we admire and praise His mercies, but let us not forget our miseries, and let us abase ourselves all

<sup>1</sup> *Devout Life*, 4th part, c. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> Job i. 21.

the more in proportion as He caresses us; for the higher we are raised, the more fatal would be a fall. Let us avoid also becoming *attached* to consolations. To-day we have an abundance of them, to-morrow we may be in dire want; no matter, provided that we find God. Let us seek Him only, let us be attached to Him only, and let us beware of fixing our heart upon the consolations which help us on our way to Him; a traveller does not attach his heart to the carriage or boat which is conveying him.

Finally, let us, as far as depends on us, moderate our consolations when they go too far. St. Teresa compares the joys of contemplation to a heavenly water. "However abundant it may be," she says, "it can never be excessive, because there cannot be any excess in what comes from God, and when He gives this living water to a soul in great quantity, He also increases its capacity to drink abundantly of it. But, as the demon and nature may mingle their wiles with these consolations, and render them impetuous and violent even to indiscretion, the saint counsels us, whenever we feel that our bodily strength is beginning to fail, or that our head is aching, to moderate these emotions, whatever consolation we may be enjoying, either by a change of subject, or by abridging the time of our prayer (provided it be not prescribed by rule); for discretion is necessary in everything.<sup>1</sup> In dryness, avoid discouragement and pusillanimity. However profound and persis-

<sup>1</sup> St. Teresa, *Way of Perfection*, xix.

tent be the aridity, with whatever temptations it be aggravated, though all hell be let loose to harass the senses and imagination, let us never lose courage. God tries us in order to purify us, and does not wish our destruction; He is a father, not a judge; He is a director, whose object is to purge the soul, to strip it of all its attachments, in order to render it better. From the moment we make serious efforts to combat temptations, and, in spite of our aridities, to occupy ourselves with God with a good will, albeit without relish or enthusiasm, the temptations which agitate the imagination and disturb the senses are merely fears, torments inflicted on the soul, assaults of the demon, but are not voluntary acts nor sins. "If you wish to know," says St. Liguori,<sup>1</sup> "the true state of your soul ask it whether, in the height of its desolation, it would commit a single deliberate venial sin, and it will answer without hesitation that it is ready to suffer not one but a thousand deaths rather than offend the Lord." If you are thus disposed, bless God and remain in peace; you are doing all that He expects from you, although you feel it not; you possess the love of God and true devotion, you want only its sweetness. On the other hand, if you perceive that, in time of desolation, your will is prone to murmuring, to bitterness, to relaxation, that it avoids God and is slovenly in prayer, correct at once these and other such defects; for the evil is in your will, and the aridity is only its occasion

<sup>1</sup> St. Liguori. *Love of Jesus Christ*, xvii.

Above all, do not abandon prayer; for you have now more need of it than ever; to do so is the sure way to fall into the snares of the enemy. Besides, "during dryness we gain most merit," as St. Alphonsus<sup>1</sup> says, provided only we persevere courageously in prayer. "Happy," he repeats, "happy he who, in spite of desolation, remains faithful to mental prayer! God will load him with His graces." But how must we employ ourselves at such a time? "Let us humble ourselves, let us be resigned. Let us humble ourselves, I repeat, and make acts of resignation." Humility and resignation; here, according to the same saint, is the true prayer of the desert. . . . Sometimes, however, an humble and peaceable resignation will be impossible, the soul is so troubled, so distracted, so helpless; then is the time to have recourse to the prayer of the drowning man, who, struggling in the water, can only shout for help."<sup>2</sup> So speaks Fr. Desurmont, and so he acted himself, like a worthy disciple of St. Liguori. "What kind of prayer do you make use of in your troubles"? some one asked him one day.—"The prayer *Kyrie eleison*," he answered.—He used to present each of his troubles before God, saying at the same time: *Kyrie eleison*. He used even to name each of his miseries, repeating *Kyrie eleison*. And is it not in truth the wisest method, when the thought of our troubles and miseries pursues us, to

<sup>1</sup> St. Liguori, *Pious Reflections*, n° 15.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Desurmont, *Divine Art of Prayer*, 7th max.



show them to God, and to make them the subject of our conversation with Him, and so to change into a prayer the very assault which threatens to stifle our prayer?

This is also the proper time to practise the prayer of patience. "But I am continually distracted," Fr. Crasset makes the soul say.<sup>1</sup> "If you are voluntarily so," he answers, "you are offending God, but if it is against your will, you are honouring, pleasing, loving Him; for everything is pleasing to God except sin, and there can be no sin where there is no will to sin. A meditation, passed in suffering, is better than one spent in consolation; it is a sweet-smelling perfume which ascends to heaven and delights Paradise. . . . Can you at present do any better than you are doing? If you can, why do you not do so? If you cannot, why are you troubled? In heaven we shall enjoy the embraces of a God of pleasure, but here below we must ourselves embrace a God of suffering. Our union with God in this life should resemble that of the holy Humanity with the Word; it was happy in the superior part, but suffering in the inferior; if any drop of consolation fell upon the sensible part it dried up immediately; His poor heart was continually immersed in an ocean of bitterness."

Let us conclude with St. Francis of Sales.<sup>2</sup> "Finally, Philothea, amidst all our dryness and barrenness let us not lose courage," but persevere

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Crasset, *On Prayer*.

<sup>2</sup> St. Francis of Sales, *Devout Life*, 4th part, c. xiv.

generously in mental prayer and the practice of virtue; "if we are not able to give our dear Spouse juicy preserves, let us offer Him dried fruits; it is all one to Him, provided that the heart which offers them is perfectly fixed in its resolution of loving Him. . . . Our actions are like roses, which, when fresh, have indeed more beauty, yet when dry have more strength and sweetness." According to the same saint, "an ounce of prayer, made in the midst of desolations, weighs more before God than a hundred pounds weight of it made in the midst of consolations."<sup>1</sup> Every one knows that delightful page, where the same saint compares the soul in the bitterness and quiet of aridity, to a statue, which its owner has placed in a niche, and which has no desire to see, nor to speak, nor to walk, but only to please its prince, and to obey its beloved Master.<sup>2</sup>

3<sup>o</sup>. *To correspond with the designs of God.*—Let us enter into God's views by profiting of our consolations and desolations to advance in the spiritual life.

"Having humbly received these consolations," says St. Francis of Sales,<sup>3</sup> "let us employ them carefully according to the intention of Him who gives them. Now, why, think you, does God give us these sweets? In order to render us meek towards every one and loving towards Himself. A mother gives her child a sugar-plum that he may give her a kiss in return; let us, then, embrace this loving Saviour who caresses us with His consola-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by St. Liguori, *Praxis*, 125.

<sup>2</sup> St. Francis of Sales, *Love of God*, b. vi., c. xi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *Devout Life*, 4th part, c. xiii.

tions. Now, to embrace our Saviour is to obey Him, to keep His Commandments, to do His will, to fly our own desires; in short, to follow Him lovingly with obedience and fidelity. When, therefore, we have received some spiritual consolation, we must on that day be more diligent in well-doing and in humbling ourselves." This is also the time to accomplish the sacrifices which have hitherto dismayed us; carried by grace, we shall have less trouble in overcoming obstacles. Besides, sensible graces are often the fore-runners of greater trials and prepare us for them: we should try then to lay up a store of courage and to hold ourselves in readiness for whatever God wills.

Desolations are the most favourable soil for the growth of humility, detachment, and other solid virtues:

Of humility. They force us to recognise our helplessness, and the fund of miseries which is within us; they are an evident and palpable proof of this, and experience itself will fully convince us of this truth. Let us acknowledge with sincerity that we have deserved these trials and even more painful ones, and that we stand in need of them in order to divest ourselves of self. Are they not the remedy either to cure, or to prevent our pride and other infirmities? Let us feel shame and abhorrence only for our spiritual maladies, and not reject what is meant to be their cure.

Of detachment. We were accustomed to seek ourselves even in the practice of piety; but if, for a long time weaned from the sweets of consolation,

we have had nevertheless sufficient generosity to persevere in prayer and the practice of virtue, we are learning to dispense with enjoyment, to serve God for His own sake, without self-interest, and at our own expense.

Of all solid virtues. "Here is what enables a soul to remain faithful and tranquil in its various states of suffering and privation. It believes in the presence of God whom it does not see; it hopes in Him against all hope; it abandons itself to Him, even when it seems to be abandoned by Him; it continues to love Him in the midst of disgust, sorrow, and bitterness; it keeps itself in conformity with His severe and crucifying decrees; it suffers a martyrdom of love; it humbles itself in the knowledge of its miseries; it remains content in its poverty, and blesses God like Job upon his dunghill. . . . Oh! if a soul did but know the honour it gives to God by this prayer of patience! If it but knew the treasures of merit that it gathers in at every moment, it would never wish to change its state. . . . It is not in the midst of light that supernatural faith is practised, but in darkness; it is not when God caresses us that hope is divine, but when He afflicts us; it is not in consolation that God is loved most purely, but in desolation. Yes, believe me, never are you doing more than when you think you are doing nothing; never are you meriting more than when you think you are meriting nothing. . . . Then it is that a man pays honour to God with his own substance, and immolates to Him his passions.

Why, then, be troubled? Why lose courage? Why abandon mental prayer?"<sup>1</sup>

Alas! I know not how to think on God.—Be satisfied, then, to love Him.—I have no heart.—Give to God your will.—I have no consolation.—Is it in order to have consolations that we betake ourselves to mental prayer? . . .—I don't know whether I love God or not.—Can it be that you do not love Him when you are patiently suffering for Him? Is it possible that you are not beloved by Him, when, amidst so many sufferings, you abandon yourself to His good pleasure, willing only what He wills?

According to Fr. Faber, our "bad" meditations, when we have no grounds to attribute them to our own fault, "are generally the most fruitful. . . . God often sends us back, as a master turns back a boy, to re-examine our course and to discover little forgotten infidelities, for which we have never done penance. . . . It is no little thing to be able to endure ourselves and our own imperfections. On the contrary, it is a fine act of humility, and draws us on towards perfection. In good truth, we may make our bad meditations pay us an usurious interest, if we choose"<sup>2</sup>

There is great need, in consolations as well as in desolations, of being very open with an experienced director, and of allowing ourselves to be guided. These paths are so complicated that it is

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Crasset, *On Mental Prayer*.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, xv.

easy to go astray in them. Besides, we have need at one time of being humbled, at another of being encouraged; at one point of our journey of being restrained from launching forth into indiscreet fervour, at another of being urged forward lest we fall into discouragement and languor.

To sum up, then, the line of conduct to be pursued by the soul is the same in consolations and desolations. The same confiding submission to Divine Providence. The same shoals to be avoided—namely, satisfied pride, which takes complacency in self, or disappointed pride, which frets, murmurs, becomes discouraged; sensuality, which greedily seeks enjoyment, or baulked sensuality, which complains of finding no satisfaction. The same zeal to enter into God's views by the practice of humility, detachment, and the other solid virtues, sometimes in abundance, sometimes in want; the same love of God, which we cultivate in consolation by loving ardently, in desolation by self-sacrifice. Circumstances may change, but the interior dispositions should remain the same.

We can, therefore, always derive profit. Consolations are sweeter, desolations more necessary, because we chiefly need to die to ourselves. Hence St. John of the Cross<sup>1</sup> teaches "that truly spiritual persons seek rather what is bitter than what is savoury; they incline to suffering more than to consolation, to be in want of everything for the love of God rather than to possess, to aridity and afflictions

<sup>1</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Carmel*, b. ii. c. vii.

rather than to the enjoyment of interior sweetness.” It is so easy to seek oneself when we wish to have always these spiritual delights! For this reason the wisest course is to abandon ourselves into the hands of Divine Providence, ready alike for desolations or consolations, but firmly resolved to profit of everything in order to advance in the way of perfection.