



LIGHT & LIFE

VOICE OF THE ROSARY CENTER & CONFRATERNITY

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CONSECRATION TO THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

By Fr. Paul A Duffner, O.P.

"Consecration to the Mother of God," says Pope Pius XII, "is a total gift of self, for the whole of life and for all eternity; and a gift which is not a mere formality or sentimentality, but effectual, comprising the full intensity of the Christian life - Marian life." This consecration, the Pope explained, "tends essentially to union with Jesus, under the guidance of Mary."

By our consecration we promise to become dependent on Mary in all things: to offer all our prayers and oblations to God through Mary, and to seek every gift from God through Mary. And we do this with the greatest confidence. Since she is our mother, she knows our needs better than we; and since she is Queen of Heaven, she has immediate access to the infinite treasury of graces in the Kingdom of her Divine Son.

Mary is not only the Mother of Jesus, Son of the Eternal Father; she is also Mother of all the Father's adopted children. As their Mother, she has been given the role of molding them into the likeness of Jesus.

Every work of grace, every increase of grace, is a work of the Holy Spirit; but as in the Incarnation of the Divine Word God used human instruments, so does He in the sanctification of each individual soul. As He chose Mary as the instrument through whom He would come to us, so He chose Mary as the instrument through whom we should go to Him. And both the mystery of God coming to us through Mary, and our being led to God through Mary, is a work of the Holy Spirit. So when we speak of Mary's unique role in our sanctification, she is but the instrument the Holy Spirit uses in sharing with us the divine life of grace. It is in this sense that Mary fashions us into the likeness of Christ.



At the Sacred Spring
Domenico Tojetti, 1877

However, that this transformation - through Mary's help - be accomplished in a notable degree, there must be an awareness of her role in our sanctification, a confidence in her maternal concern and in her power under God, a surrender of oneself into her hands, and a fervent, frequent and confident seeking of her aid. This usually comes through some form of consecration to the Mother of God.

At Fatima Our Lady asked for consecration to her Immaculate Heart, a consecration which, among other things, calls for the devotion of the Five First Saturdays, which includes the Rosary, meditation and Communion of reparation - all done in reparation to her Immaculate Heart. It involves a striving to fulfill her requests for prayer and sacrifices for the conversion of sinners and in reparation for offenses against the Divine Majesty. In a word, it involves a striving to fulfill all that she asked for at Fatima, and trying to bring others to heed her requests.

Living that consecration means becoming an apostle of Mary, striving to imitate her virtues, and to place in her hands the flowers of little sacrifices of reparation for the salvation of souls, so that we might strengthen her hand against the attacks of the Evil One, and

hasten the day of the triumph of her Immaculate Heart. To everyone who makes that consecration and sincerely tries to live it, the words of Our Lady to the child Lucia at Fatima would also apply: "I will never leave you; my Immaculate Heart will be your refuge, and the way that will lead you to God." ■

He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
(Luke 1:48)

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Intermediate Steps on Our Spiritual Journey Part II: The Path of Illumination

By Fr. Ambrose Sigman, O.P.

Standing between the path of purgation, the path wherein we struggle to free ourselves of the sins and vices which weigh us down and hold us back, and the path which leads to our final union with God, is a path of knowledge and divine illumination. Once we have purged ourselves of bad habits and sinful preoccupations, a path of knowledge and light is opened for us. This path has traditionally been referred to as the Illuminative Way.

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

To understand better this pathway, what it entails, and how we advance along it, we go back to an event which many of us have experienced in our youth: the Sacrament of Confirmation. God guides us along the illuminative way by means of the gifts He has given us in Confirmation, the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The graces we receive at Baptism serve the purpose of mortifying the old self and aiding the general growth of the new. The gifts and graces we received at Confirmation remain generally covered up as long as we live in a state of purgation, the sin and vice of our lives tend to obscure these confirmation gifts, and we rely on the graces of Baptism to help us to cleanse ourselves. As this process of cleansing progresses, the gifts of the Holy Spirit will begin to shine through. They are intended to remake and intensify the powers of the knowledge of the soul and of courageous perseverance in God. They are gifts for enlightening the mind, and because of this, they are gifts which fortify and aid the mind in its orientation toward God. They are meant to open the spirit in us and to make rich our life in the Holy Spirit.

The grace of Baptism sets in motion the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Their work is to pierce the heavy layers of the passions, so that finally the light of these gifts, the Holy Spirit, might flood through the opening into the deepest regions of our nature. With the acquisition of each virtue, won at the removal of each layer of the passions, this light becomes stronger and more transparent. After we have made some progress in the acquisition of virtue, the horizon of our consciousness begins to redden with the first glow of illumination, so that on the peak of dispassion, the whole sun of the Holy Spirit might shine forth. We turn now to an examination of each of the gifts.

THE FIRST GIFT: FEAR OF THE LORD

The first gift is the fear of God. We discussed this gift in the first part. Through this gift we struggle to shed ourselves of the sins and burdens which hold us back and shroud our vision. This is where we begin to move away from fear of punishment toward a more perfect fear of God as described by the great spiritual authors. In his *Discourses and Sayings*, Dorotheos of Gaza wrote the following:

This is the man who has true love, which St John calls perfect love, and that love leads a man on to perfect fear. Such a man fears and keeps to God's will, not for fear of punishment, not to avoid condemnation, but because he has tasted the sweetness of being with God; he fears he may fall away from it; he fears to be turned away from it. This is the perfect fear which is generated from perfect love and throws out that preliminary fear. And this is why he [the Apostle John] says that perfect love casts out fear. But it is impossible to come to perfect fear except through that preliminary fear.

These are some of the first steps we take out of the darkness of sin, and into the light of the Spirit. In the same vein, we rely on the gift of courage to help us to persevere in the struggle against those things which hold us back, which blind us to the light. We rely on the courage and strength given us by God to help see us through these struggles with patient endurance.

THE SECOND AND THIRD GIFTS: COUNSEL AND RIGHT JUDGMENT

The next gifts are counsel and right judgment. These gifts bring with them the capacity of discernment. These help us to carry out the divine commands using our best judgment and aid us in sizing up the circumstances of every situation. In an early spiritual work detailing the words and deeds of the desert fathers, the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, the following saying is attributed to one of the monks, "Abba Poemen also said, 'There is a person carrying an axe who chops away the whole day long and does not succeed in getting the tree down. There is another person, experienced in felling, who brings the tree down with a few cuts.' He said that the axe is discernment." At the beginning we act mostly from the fear of God, carrying out His commands for the simple reason that He has given them. Later, however, we begin to realize through our own judgment that what God commands us to do is good, but what stops us is evil. At the same time, we begin to understand what is most suitable to fulfill the commandments in each circumstance.

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THE FOURTH GIFT: UNDERSTANDING

From these first flickers of light, we progress to a brighter one, the gift of understanding. This gift teaches us how to realize in a practical way the blessings which have been revealed to us by God's commands in such a way as to gain virtue. It is possible for a person to understand these blessings, but not know how to realize them in a satisfactory or practical way, because he works without good judgment. The gift of understanding, then, is what teaches us how to do a good thing with good judgment.

THE FIFTH GIFT: KNOWLEDGE

After this comes the gift of knowledge. The gift of knowledge reveals to us the very reason or deeper motivation of each command and virtue. Now I no longer just know in general, for example, that it is better to be humble than arrogant, but I realize that by humility I reach the point where I can see the glory of God. I realize that arrogance blinds me; I end up seeing only myself.

THE SIXTH GIFT: PIETY

Following upon these gifts comes the gift of piety. With the gift of piety, we go beyond the simple theoretical understanding and penetration of the meaning of the virtues into a personal, affective identification with them. This takes the practice of virtue and the life of the Spirit out of a purely intellectual realm and includes the other aspects of the human soul. We might think of this as a more integrative gift, bringing all our faculties, along with reason, into a disposition oriented to God.

THE SEVENTH GIFT: WISDOM

Finally, we have the gift of wisdom. This gift brings us to the simple and exact contemplation of the truth in all things. In everything that we do or understand, we now have a vision of the whole, of the relationship of our deeds and actions with the universal order. With the full light of wisdom, illumination, in the strict sense of the word, begins. The wise person understands in an all-encompassing way the truth in all things, that is, they see them in their interdependent relationships, each with its purpose and at the same time its cause, namely God. Wisdom is the gift of seeing God simultaneously with all things or seeing them through God, as Maker, Sustainer and effective Guide of all things. It helps us to understand our past and its purpose, and the path that we should follow in the future; it reveals to us the interdependent meaning of the events of human life and of the things in nature, because they all share in the same, unique Power and Cause which stands at the base of all things.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit, then, guide and sustain us in the mediated knowledge of God. This is distinct from the direct knowledge of God, which is a part of the final stage of the spiritual ascent, the phase of the union of the soul with God and a vision of the divine light. In the second phase, that of illumination, the focus is on the knowledge of God achieved by means of nature and human actions, individual and collective.

Because this mediated knowledge of God is also a knowledge through the Holy Spirit, by His gifts, already in this second step our knowledge is a knowledge in the Spirit. It is a knowledge in the Holy Spirit because it takes place after the person, through the virtues and the power of the Holy Spirit, has unlocked or actualized the spirit in him or herself, as the central and most intimate place of the mind. This person has opened the eyes destined for the vision of God (this is where the patristic/medieval notion of the spiritual senses can come into play). The illuminating gifts of the Spirit become obvious to the person only by the opening of these eyes, of this room meant to be filled with the divine light. The Holy Spirit makes Himself known to us through the activation of our spirit.

CONTEMPLATION OF GOD IN CREATION

We turn now to examine what this mediated knowledge of God is and how we acquire it. The first way described by Christian spiritual authors is through the contemplation of God in creation. You may have heard it said that the Old Law was a teacher that led the people to Christ. It prepared the way for His coming, and for our reception of Him. This was necessary because human beings are like children when it comes to our level of understanding, we need to be led and guided along the right path. In the same way, human beings are led by the reflections and puzzles of the created world to knowledge of God. By reflecting upon His creation and its meaning we can come to a partial understanding of the Creator.

Saint Maximus the Confessor has said a great deal on this topic. According to Saint Maximus, all created things hide within themselves what he calls divine *logoi*. This Greek word can mean "word, meaning, reason, understanding," and a whole host of other things. In this case, it refers to the underlying purpose or meaning that a created thing has in the overall scheme of creation, and it is possible to grasp these *logoi*, and so come to a greater understanding of the created order. These *logoi* are but rays of light which shine forth from the supreme *Logos*, or Word of God, so to understand these things leads us to a greater understanding of God Himself.

This teaching attributes to creation a necessary role in the ascent of the person to God. On the road of our approach to God stands the world and we must pass through an understanding of it. Every person has a mission connected with the world, everyone must know it according to the power given to them, and since, in a spiritual sense, the acquisition of knowledge and virtue go hand in hand, everyone must develop a moral activity in relationship to the world. Because of this, a mainly negative attitude toward the world frustrates salvation itself. The world is imposed on everyone as a stone for sharpening the spiritual faculties. In this way the world can be a teacher, but it can also be the road to hell. It is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of testing. If we look at its beauty in order to praise the Creator, we are saved; if we think that its fruit is simply something to eat, we are lost.

CONTEMPLATION OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE

Another way we acquire this knowledge of God is in the reading of the Scriptures, but done in a certain way, interpreting the Scriptures spiritually. Among many of the Fathers of the Church, the Scriptures were believed to have three levels of meaning: the literal, the moral, and the spiritual. In the great early exegete, Origen of Alexandria, this is compared to the structure of the human person (body, soul and spirit), just as God made man in three parts, so He instilled Scripture with three levels of meaning (see *Peri Archon* 3.4.2, 4.2.4).

The literal meaning is the shell, the body, the leaves that cover the fruit. It is meant to edify and is only present when the text itself is edifying. It either informs the reader of an historical event which demonstrates God's involvement with humanity, or it exhorts by moral precept or offers an example of virtuous behavior. The psychic meaning is moral in character but is different from the somatic sense. An example of this from Scripture can be found in 1 Corinthians 9:9-10, the Corinthians are plowmen who owe a portion of their goods to the minister, the ox, who aids them in their spiritual growth. The psychic sense refers to a nonliteral moral precept for virtuous living. The somatic sense is tied to the letter, but the psychic sense falls beyond the letter. Finally, there is the pneumatic (spiritual) sense. This sense, also nonliteral, concerns God's past, present and future help to the reader in preparing them for salvation. This sense focuses on incarnational truths, predicting and explaining events associated with Christ's coming; and eschatological truths, giving insight into Christ's return.

TYOLOGY

Two common methods used by the Fathers for the interpretation of Scripture are typology and allegory. Typology is a method of interpretation which sees some event, person, or object from the Old Testament, as somehow foreshadowing some event, person or object which comes along later, usually in the New Testament. We see this in Isaiah 43:18-21, where a new Exodus is discussed by the prophet, and in Romans 5:14, where Adam is seen as the type of the One to come, Christ Himself.

Typology assumes that God's dealings with His people constitute a single continuous process in which a uniform pattern can be discerned. Typology assumes that God acts in history, and that His actions constitute a unified and meaningful process over time. God has a plan for His people, unfolding according to His design, and this design is to some extent discernible in historical figures and events. Typology then is effective for maintaining the unity of the Old and New Testament, it helps us to see how the Old Testament continues to be relevant to us. The key to this unity is Christ Himself, and typology serves the purpose of exposing and explaining this unity.

ALLEGORY

Allegory, on the other hand, was a way to bring out the hidden meaning veiled beneath the people, events and

objects of Scripture. It allowed the movement from the historical/specific to the spiritual/universal. This was a way of seeing the relevance of the text for the contemporary reader/hearer. One must be careful with the use of allegory, though, and in fact many opposed the use of allegory for different reasons. Many saw it as a license to read into the text whatever one desired. Often, many seemingly bizarre interpretations can be laid at its feet. But, even if someone rejected allegory, they never rejected the notion that Scripture contained within it a hidden, spiritual meaning that needed to be discovered and interpreted.

We can see some of this in practice, for example, through an interpretation of Psalm 42. Psalm 42 was considered one of the most pointed examples of contemplative desire. Fundamentally, this psalm is a prayer, it is written in the first person, and addresses God as "you." The psalms, to the Fathers, were a record of the soul's journey to God. The anxiety of the parched stag is matched by the anxiety of the psalmist who seeks the fountains which give life (v. 3a). His inability to satisfy this longing causes him to lament, a pain compounded by the taunt of his enemies (v.4b). Mocking stirs reflection on happier times. The sound of rejoicing is still distant (5), and the psalmist chides his soul to hope in God (6). Yet, despite this admonition, the psalmist questions God (10), and the psalm concludes with a soliloquy (12).

In this interior monologue is a soul torn between hope in God, while lamenting the loss of a former intimacy with Him. These conflicting emotions demand a reading which honors both this present anxiety and the future hope. The tears and joy of the psalmist are apt metaphors for the pilgrimage of moral progress. In discussing this text, the interpreter's chief aim is to develop the relationship of the hearer to the text. The concepts developed here are developed in relation to the situation of the hearer. This situation is the hearer's participation in the life of the Church, his relationship to Christ, to the Scriptures, to the clergy, to one another. An allegorical exegesis of the psalm illuminates the situation of the hearer. We see, then, that an interpretation of the Scriptures that moves beyond the literal opens for us avenues of knowledge and understanding about God, His Creation, and our own interior lives. It provides food for our spiritual self-reflection and helps us to traverse the path toward our ultimate union with God.

We have seen now what this intermediary stage looks like, what it demands of us, as well as what benefits it brings to the soul. The final stage to be addressed in the next newsletter is the end of the spiritual life, the purpose and meaning of our spiritual journey, our ultimate union with God. ■

Note from the Director

Dear faithful supporters of the Rosary Center & Confraternity, THANK-YOU to all who have already donated to help us. We cannot do this without you! We rely on your ongoing support. May God bless you for your generosity!

Fr. Peter Do, O.P.