

## THE FOLLY OF SANCTITY

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THE spiritual life, to the average mortal, is a queer manner of existence and an unfathomable mystery. Its unpopularity is nothing new, but throughout history, has been regarded with the same studied aversion. Just as it is generally unknown and shunned among the present generation, so has it been since man fell from his original state of innocence and holiness. There has ever existed this age-long combat of the flesh with the spirit, of the spiritual man striving to rise above the level and inclinations of his fallen nature. Because this struggle for spiritual perfection has never been attained without painful effort and unrelenting discipline and because the laws of the spiritual life stand in such marked contrast to the spirit and standards of the world, the vast majority of men has preferred to give it not so much as a passing notice. It is easier for human nature to follow the course of least resistance. The way of spiritual perfection demands the sacrifice of much that delights the exterior, natural man for the attainment of what is of a higher sphere, and in this lies the reason for its popular antipathy and disesteem.

Perhaps in no period of history more than in our own, have methods of living contributed to produce such spiritual lethargy and indifference. It is an era of great material progress, conferring on mankind every conceivable benefit for his convenience and bodily welfare. The intellect, genius and industry of man have been indefatigable in bringing about a constant evolution of inventions that conduce to the material uplift happiness and comfort of humanity. But it is precisely this mechanical and materialistic civilization that is destroying man's knowledge and appreciation of what is spiritual. This bewildering development of our present day existence has tended to numb our sensibility to the superior values of our inner life. While scientific advancement is good in itself, man is allowing himself to be mastered by it and is becoming a slave to the instruments that were made to serve him. In too many cases it has led to the denial of the soul

of man, has deified his intelligence and the general effect has been to make us self-satisfied, self-indulgent and apathetic to anything above our material surroundings. Progress is not to be condemned, but only when it effects a corresponding advancement in the spiritual life of man, should it receive the fullest measure of praise and support.

Another reason may be advanced to explain the almost universal ignorance and distaste for the spiritual life. It is the fact that so many thousands of otherwise good and well-intentioned souls, are outside the pale of God's true Church and are being led by those who have no claim to religious leadership and who do not share in the treasury and divinity of her supernatural life. It is a patent fact today, that Protestantism in all its ramifications cannot offer a counteracting influence against this steady trend toward neo-paganism. As branches that have been torn from the sturdy trunk during the course of the storm, live on for a time but gradually wither for want of nourishment and vitality, so has been the history of the religious life of Protestantism. It cannot impart religious ideals because it does not imbibe from the source of true spirituality. Her teachings have not fostered a love and desire for genuine heroic sanctity but at most would cultivate virtue from merely natural and philanthropic motives. As a consequence, vast multitudes of her children have suffered from a great spiritual famine.

From what has been said, then, it is not surprising that of all vocations to which man is called, the life of sanctity should be the most misunderstood. Not only is it generally considered inferior to all other walks of life, but it is not even thought to be compatible with them. To aspire to a life of extraordinary holiness, is in the eyes of the worldly-minded, the surrender of man's greatest endowments—liberty and happiness. It is inconceivable to them, how human beings claiming to be rational, can throw aside and even spurn those attractions which the world values so highly, and in their place, embrace a life of voluntary and absolute poverty, renounce completely those pleasures of the body which people of the world may rightly enjoy, and submit with uninterrupted and perfect obedience to the will of a superior. It seems so absurd that men and women should find it necessary to scourge their bodies and heap upon it every manner of penance. Following in the trail of the modern evolution of things, runs the common sentiment that sanctity is a thing out

of date, a morbid fad of an age long past; that saints are an impractical class, and their lives as a whole, unfashionable. Looked upon as fools, it is often believed that sanctity and sanity cannot coexist in the same individual. So widespread have been these distorted notions of the lives of the saints, that their influence has made itself apparent even in the lives of not a few members of the true faith who, weak in their faith and affected by their environment, do not hesitate at times to acquiesce in remarks of jest and ridicule when speaking of the saints.

In spite of the many-sided repugnance to the spiritual life and its general misconception, sanctity and saintly characters have always existed and as long as time endures, will continue to grace our earth and appeal to the more magnanimous of God's creatures. This appeal to the interior life is the product of the Catholic Church. Being a spiritual society, perfect in itself, she has need of resources and every variety of spiritual life to suit the individual needs of each soul, just as civil society has need of men engaged in different professions and every form of labor. She alone can satisfy the spiritual hunger that every soul from time to time must feel. She takes this character from her divine Founder, Christ, whose mission upon earth was not only to bring the gospel message of salvation to all men, but also to offer more generous souls the greatest latitude of spiritual growth. The Catholic Church claims exclusively this prerogative of holiness, this mission of leading men and women along the path to sanctity because in her inception she is holy; because she has preserved intact the entire deposit of doctrine committed to her; and because she alone has received the promise of supernatural guidance in the matter of instructing mankind according to holiness and truth. Only in her is to be found the mark and seal of divinity and the channels of grace through which man is regenerated and made a "stockholder" in the communion of saints. No other religion can be holy in the sense that the Catholic Church is holy, although from their ranks may come many good and pious souls. No other religion can claim its saints. Christ did not expect all men to reach those sublime heights of Christian perfection which is the privileged lot of myriads of His creatures, but He appealed to all who would follow Him to "be perfect as also their heavenly Father is perfect" as we read in the gospel of St. Matthew. In this counsel, we see that Christ placed no limit to which men might attain in striving after holi-

ness since God is infinite in His perfections. St. Paul addressed the Thessalonians in these words: "This is the will of God, your sanctification." And in reply to the young man in the gospel who aspired to a life of more than ordinary holiness our divine Saviour laid down the rule: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow Me." From the very earliest ages of the Church, men and women have heeded his counsel and their inclinations to follow in the footsteps of the divine Master. In every century, the Church has produced saints and fostered sanctity. Even to our day, be it said to her praise and honor, she has not failed in her mission. She continues in every generation to raise up to God's glory and for our inspiration and emulation, men and women who have lived upon our earth, encountered the same struggles against worldliness, pride and sensuality, but who now reign victorious within the Church Triumphant.

To understand how saintly characters can make the sacrifices that to the world seem so severe and painful, it is necessary to understand their motive which is love, Divine Love, and the love of all things worth while. When love rules the heart, it makes all things sweet and all burdens light. It is within the knowledge and experience of all mankind how powerful and efficacious is this impelling force of love. No civic virtue is esteemed more highly than one's love of country whether in times of war it moves one to endure sufferings and death in its cause, or in times of peace to devote one's life and energies in the interest of the common good. That man or woman who will undergo pain and agony or sacrifice his life in the cause of his fellow-men, is venerated with the profoundest respect and the memory of such a noble soul is written in letters of gold. Yet all these expressions of human love are but shadows of that supreme love of Him who first said and afterwards accomplished, "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends." The whole gospel story is a narrative of love and because Christ, our God, is Love, He has drawn to Himself those ardent souls who would imitate His example and who eagerly, joyously and generously "leave all things" to follow in their Master's footsteps. This is the spiritual dynamo that actuates the saints; this is that incomprehensible force which finds expression in those extraordinary deeds which the world is wont



to call eccentric, foolhardy and vacuous. The exterior world remains insensible to and untouched by that glowing furnace of divine charity that burns within the soul of the saint and because it sees and judges only that which falls beneath the senses, it cannot but proclaim as immeasurable folly these effusions of love.

With a desire that is really tremendous the saints set about the task of "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ." "There is at one and the same time in sanctity," said Lacordaire, "something which wounds human sense and something which transports it, something which produces astonishment and something which produces admiration." Of equal intensity with their love of God, and as a consequence of it, is that interior impulse and longing of the saints for self-conquest. God cannot be the supreme possession of the human soul while the latter remains fettered and restrained by the imperfections of human nature. Without exception, their aspiration to spiritual perfection and union of the soul with God manifests itself in innumerable and widely varying mortifications. Self-abnegation—this is the fundamental law of the spiritual life. "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die," said our Saviour, "itself remaineth alone." Self-love must receive the death sentence; pride, vanity and wilfulness must be purged away; and not only toward all exterior things must the saint exercise a complete detachment, but also in regard to those interior personal affections of the soul. Not until then will the life of grace reign untrammelled in the human spirit and it is only then that he will begin "to taste and see that the Lord is sweet." We must not imagine that the penitential and disciplinary acts of the saints, which so frequently shock and horrify ordinary folk, are altogether painful. They are prompted and tempered by love and with a view to that perfect peace and sweetness that comes of penance. In all his actions the saint faithfully follows the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, the Sanctifier of the soul. In this he is most exact in corresponding with all graces conferred upon him and is ever ready to accept humiliations, rebukes and sufferings through which his soul is purified, strengthened and made participator in the divine nature.

The folly of the Cross is a mystery to the worldly wise. So has it been and so it will always be because the spirit of the Cross and the spirit of the world mutually exclude each other. No man was ever loved as Christ, the Leader of the Saints, was

loved, but at the same time, no man was ever despised, hated and feared more than He was. His enemies, the Pharisees and Scribes, were ever restless in their purpose of humiliating Him and making His mission appear ridiculous in the eyes of the people. His lowly birth and hidden life, the nature of His doctrine and the type of His followers seemed to them unfitting to One who claimed to be a King. Condemned as an imposter, the closing scene of His divine mission on Calvary was intended to end a Life of seeming folly. His Apostles and disciples shared no more honorable fate but into all the nations of the world to which they were sent to spread the Kingdom of Heaven, they bore His character and the persecutions and misunderstandings that awaited them were the result of fear and hatred of the Way of the Cross. It was to be a mark of predilection by which Christ's followers were to be known and to our very day, every man or woman who wished to follow Him in that intimate union of love and true mysticism has had to become a fool for His sake. St. Paul long ago told us that "the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen that He may confound the strong."

The saints, then, are the chosen ones of Christ. Of all men, they are the wisest, the most heroic, and the most useful, and our scientific civilization is not so far advanced that we can afford to do without them. Their wisdom is of the highest order because they, above all, properly appreciate and labor for the values of Eternal Life. Like other men, they must pass through this world subject to all its trials and labors but they never allow their immediate duties or recreations to obscure the one all-important purpose of mortal life. They are in the world, but not of it. We call them heroes in the truest sense of the word because they have fought and overcome the greatest enemy that ever challenged any man—Self. No earthly conqueror is to be compared to them for though he should be able to hold all nations of the earth at his command and still be under the dominion of his own flesh, the greatest of his victories is yet to be accomplished. To all thinking men, the example of the saints cannot fail to instruct and inspire. They are the mirrors of Christ Himself, reflecting in their lives the beauty of divine goodness. By their eminent charity for God and man, they diffuse about them the sweet odor of sanctity. We marvel at the simplicity and

humility of their lives, even amid circumstances and surroundings that most people make the pitfalls of pride, luxury and selfishness. They have been moulded in the school of self-knowledge and self-discipline and for this reason they are our authoritative guides in the science of human nature. There is no walk of life in which we do not find saints of practical holiness and of temperaments so varying and appealing as not to find a prototype for each of us. If we study them we will admire and imitate them and that part of the world which we occupy will become a paradise in itself. In closing this paper, we could do no better than cite those poignant words of the great Apostle of the Gentiles: "If any man among you seem to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

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### *The Holy Name*

The angels hosts adoring  
Hear human lips proclaim  
With Mary and Saint Joseph—  
That Jesus is the name.

All hail O Name of glory  
Of mercy and of might,  
Our strength in all temptations  
And in our darkness light!

For no one in life's battle  
Has called to Thee in vain:  
O Name of God triumphant!  
To speak thee is to reign!