

Thursday after Septuagesima: How we must make use of Creatures for the Service of God

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

We will tomorrow consider in our meditation how we must serve God by the use of creatures, and we shall see how, in order to do so, we must use: first, things which are necessary to life; second, things which are not necessary. We will then make the resolution: first, to look upon all that happens to us and all that we have to do only as means for sanctifying ourselves; second, to desire nothing upon earth except the good pleasure of God, and in everything to prefer that which best leads us to our end, which is our salvation. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the same as that of yesterday: "*How will that serve me for God and for eternity?*"

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore God as the essential end of all things, as the adorable centre towards which all our thoughts and all our affections, all our projects and all our actions ought to converge. With this end in view let us render Him our homage.

HOW TO USE THINGS WHICH ARE NECESSARY TO LIFE

Things which are necessary to life are sleep, food, clothing, lodging, and the thousand little attentions which the body claims and the relaxations which our weak nature cannot do without. The worldly man places his happiness in low and miserable things. To sleep well, to eat well, to be well clothed and well lodged, to want for nothing, to amuse himself, and to do nothing—this, in his opinion, is supreme happiness, and he would willingly addict himself to it throughout eternity. But the true Christian thinks very differently. He feels himself humiliated at being the slave of so many necessities, condemned to act the corpse during the large portion of his existence which is given to sleep; to play the animal several times a day, in browsing like the beasts and assimilating his food like them; in hiding himself beneath clothing by a very legitimate shame of himself; to have for his lodgement and for comforts of the simplest kind so many needs which require the concurrence of the products of the earth and the fleece of animals and the arms of a thousand labourers; lastly, to do nothing during a notable part of his life, because otherwise his mind and his body would be overwhelmed with fatigue. If he satisfies these miserable necessities it is only in sighing and in observing the three rules of the saints: *take, thank, fear*. First, *take*—take what is simply necessary, and nothing beyond that; take it, not to satisfy your body and to give it pleasure, but only from the desire to obey God, who so wills it. Take it in a spirit of humility and resignation, which submits to the necessity of its condition for the good pleasure of God, which is its only love. Second, *give thanks*; in taking what is necessary thank God who gives it you in a better measure and under more advantageous conditions than to many others. If what is necessary is pleasant to your taste and to your senses, thank God who spoils you and treats you far better than you deserve; if you do not like it, still give thanks to God who gives you an opportunity of mortifying yourself and acquiring merits. Third, *fear*—be afraid of attaching your heart to the creature, be afraid of

taking more than is necessary, and make God a generous sacrifice of what is superfluous. Be afraid lest the body should weigh down the soul; be afraid lest being too well satisfied it should revolt (Prov. XXIX:21). The observance of these holy rules will cause effeminacy, intemperance, the loss of time, pleasure taken solely because it is pleasure, to disappear; by means of them all ill-regulated habits will be restrained, all useless expenses will be retrenched, and all desires will be moderated. How many things there are which I can do without, we shall say to ourselves. But of them will be formed a rich foundation for charity, and the spirit of sacrifice, entering into the whole of our conduct, will raise the soul to holiness. Let us sigh, in the presence of God, that we have observed these holy rules so little, and let us propose henceforth to conform our conduct to them.

HOW TO USE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT NECESSARY TO LIFE

By things not necessary is to be understood the more or less of amusements we might have for ourselves, the more or less of wealth which we might amass, the more or less of glory and reputation we might acquire, a certain kind of life, certain occupations, certain pastimes, such as games, visits, and other like things. The rule to be followed is to ask ourselves: What use can I make of that for God, for my eternity? If it be useful for these ends we must lovingly embrace it; if, on the contrary, it is hurtful, we must reject it with horror. If it be in itself neither hurtful nor advantageous, we must be indifferent to it, not desiring one thing more than another, health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honour rather than contempt, a long life rather than a short one. The only legitimate preference in the use of created things is when they lead us more surely. Thus pious exercises well performed, profound devotion in prayer, habitual recollection, useful and moderate occupations, will bring me nearer to God; I will therefore apply myself to them. Sin, voluntary imperfections, dangerous occasions, too natural attachments, dissipation, an excessive desire to succeed, too great intercourse with the world, would turn me away from God; therefore I renounce them. If I meet in my path with indifferent things, I will make the sacrifice of them, and then they will become useful for my salvation. Alas! why have I not followed these rules? How much better should I have lived!

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.