

LOVE OF GOD

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FOR the ordinary person, hemmed in by his everyday and often monotonous job, it is very difficult to see any link between his life and the love of God. Exasperating anxieties with regard to meeting his financial commitments, and often worries with regard to health and well-being of his family, seem to preclude any connection between his life as he has to live it and that love of God as exemplified in the lives of saints and possibly 'good' people he happens to know. He may be punctilious about his religious duties, and feel in some dim way that God does hear his prayers, but somehow the love of God is not a reality for *him*. He *wants* to love God but does not know how!

Perhaps if we acknowledge that it is very, very difficult to find God in our modern industrial cities, amidst the noise, dirt, smoke, and artificial crowding together of great numbers of people—perhaps if we recognize that it is hard for some, in these conditions, to admit that there is a God at all, we may then start from very little and try to build on that.

Mother Church has something for all her children and there is no need to seek outside her fold for something that we think may be found elsewhere—in 'spiritism' or the mystics of the East, for example. There is, in the doctrine of the divine indwelling or the abiding presence of God within, pre-eminently a truth that is often overlooked or not understood, and which holds a special meaning for the extraverted age of today. When it is impossible to see the touch of God's hand in anything about us, so ugly does it seem, then let us look within. Sanctifying grace received at baptism, and the presence of God in human souls, is a reality and is a doctrine of the Church also—no less. Can this be true of that disagreeable neighbour next door, that pushing and shoving person on the bus and tube? Yes, it can be true, and in this doctrine Mother Church has comfort and hope for all such. How can we make a beginning? how do we realize this abiding presence of Christ within? This is what Brother Lawrence had to say: "To be with God it is not necessary to be always in church. We may make a chapel of our heart whereto to escape from time to time to talk with him

quietly, humbly and lovingly. Everyone is capable of such close communion with God, some more, some less: he knows what we can do. Begin then; perhaps he is waiting for a single generous resolution. Have courage. There is but little time to live. . . . Let us live and die with God. . . . Little by little, then, get used to worshipping him in this way; imploring his grace, offering him your heart sometimes during the day, very often in the course of your work, if you are able to. Do not hamper yourself with set rules or forms of devotion, but go on with faith, with love and with humility.' Nothing very complicated here, nothing out of the ordinary: we do not have to be very learned, or well read, or particularly 'good', to practise this. We do not have to be in church, very quiet, or in any special place (although all three may make it easier!). Very often we may have to turn to him in the midst of a crowd, and make a quiet place for him in our own hearts. Perhaps it had better be said here that this 'practice of the presence of God' in our hearts is not meant to take the place of the liturgical worship of the Church, or the receiving of the sacraments—these are necessary to nourish our spiritual life, without which the practice of the presence of God will be rendered more difficult. The first and most important thing is to want God, with a loving movement of our heart towards him. Not for what he can give us, or for the answering of some petition, but because we love him—we who are sustained in being by his love. We may not consciously know that we love him, but if we want him then that is a turning of our wills to him; and God, who can read all hearts and minds, knows he can build on that.

Gradually as this turning to God within us becomes more habitual, we begin to find ourselves looking at people and things in a different way: sometimes, quite suddenly, we will 'see' them for the first time—see them from the inside out, as it were—and when we do that we find that we have a new and hitherto unknown capacity for understanding and love. We become aware of all created things in a different way—not as they affect *me*—but as things in their own right, given us by God for our use, not as abuse. Turning more and more to the indwelling Holy Spirit, of which we are the temples, as St Paul reminds us, we must come to see the sacredness and essential holiness of our own bodies. Materialism, and the materialistic outlook caused so largely by the divorce of 'spirit' from 'matter', has very often made us think

of our bodies as being quite separate from our spirit: hence its functions are either thought of, or spoken about, as though they were purely mechanical, or as though they were not quite 'nice'. Neither view is right. Man is an entity—body-mind-spirit—and the three cannot be separated, they must function *together*. It is only by an understanding of what man *is*, that we can come to a realization of the importance of the teaching of the Church on these matters. Especially in regard to the sacred function of sex. If we separate this function from mind and spirit, and think of it as something that only concerns the body, then we get all sorts of abuses, not least of which are artificial birth-prevention, homosexuality, and artificial insemination—all of which are rife today.

The indwelling Holy Spirit, then, begins to enlarge our horizons, and our capacity for understanding—first about ourselves and what we are, extending outwards to include the whole of life. This inner transformation comes about gradually, without our being aware that a change is taking place. Only we are more aware of the divine presence within us, and we do find ourselves turning to him more and more—at all sorts of times and when least expected. From this turning inwards to Christ, our divine guest, we are led outwards away from self, to see the world around us, in some degree with his eyes and with his love. We no longer are immersed in our own problems, or at any rate see them as being exclusive to ourselves, but as part of a larger whole, part of the problem of everyman—of our neighbour. When we have come to this we may feel that there is something we must *do*, and instantly think of this or that cause to which we must give our support. This may be right in individual cases, but more probably there are a number of small things that can be done first, for our neighbour. But most important of all is the fact that we have learned to turn to Christ within our own souls, to draw strength and grace from his indwelling spirit, and thus we can become by this means an active cell of prayer. Christ present, living and acting within and through us. Wherever we are, on crowded trains and buses, or in our own homes—at all times, all places—we can offer up prayers for those around us, for those we know who are in need, and for those suffering everywhere.

We are all called to this apostolate, and it is within the capacity of everyone.