

heart to think on Jhesus'. The soul desires Jesus only, and is tranquil. Then will he speak to her, not, of course, in an audible voice, but by riveting the attention, and opening the understanding, so that she sees him as a master, father, or 'lovely spouse'.

MAKING TIME FOR GOD

BY

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HOW I should like to deepen my spiritual life by more prayer and reading; but I simply haven't the time—this complaint can often be heard from many who earnestly desire a more intimate relationship with God and feel that what prevents them from achieving it is mainly lack of that minimum of leisure which is indispensable for an intense life of prayer.

Yet, if we look at the Saints we shall discover the paradoxical phenomenon that the more they prayed the more time they seemed to have for their apostolic work. Whether we take St Dominic or St Teresa, St Bernard or St Catherine of Siena, we are confronted with the fact that they accomplished in a very short time tasks sufficient for several ordinary long human lives, and in addition gave what seems to us a disproportionate amount of time to prayer. It looks, indeed, as if our Lord's promise that to those who seek first the Kingdom of God all else will be added includes also time. If we give time to him he will give it back to us with interest. This may sound somewhat mysterious, but the importance of the time factor in the spiritual life will become clearer if it is first considered from the purely natural point of view.

Though the proverb says that time is money most people are much more careful about how they spend their money than about spending their time. Yet the Saints regard time as a gift from God, granted them in order to work out their salvation in it. There is a poignant urgency in many of the New Testament sayings on time, for example in those words of our Lord, 'I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work' (Jn. 9 :4), and of St Paul, 'See, therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly . . . redeeming the time' (Eph. 5: 15 f.).

In this matter, as in so many others, the children of the world are often wiser than the children of light. What is the secret of those businessmen, writers, doctors, politicians, who seem to cram into the twenty-four hours of their day three times as much as other

people without appearing unduly hurried or flustered? It is easily told, but not so easily followed: It is simply a systematically planned day in which first things are allowed to come first, with fixed hours for everything, yet sufficient elasticity to allow for unforeseen interruptions.

The 'Rule of Life' recommended by spiritual directors is nothing more than such a 'planned day' with special regard to the life of the soul, where it is particularly necessary, because prayer and spiritual reading are so easily crowded out by other things that seem more urgent at the moment. One argues that it will be possible to find half an hour for prayer later on—and then it is bedtime, and the half hour has never materialised. For the period (or periods) of prayer it is important to choose a time when interruptions are least likely to occur, and for many this will be the early morning, the time preferred by our Lord himself and by many Saints after him. But if this should be impossible, there is always the chance of slipping into a church for half an hour after work, before going home for dinner, or possibly during the lunch hour, or before going to bed. The chief thing is to set apart at least one definite period and to keep to it regularly, unless prevented by exceptional circumstances.

Beside these set periods of prayer there are other possibilities of 'making time for God'; the lives of the Saints are full of examples. When St Catherine was deliberately deprived by her parents of any time for herself she humbly endured the trial, and while it lasted turned the most commonplace occupations into opportunities for prayer. Modern life, too, is full of such opportunities: Père Lamy used to say the Rosary while walking from one place to another visiting his parishioners. Saying the Rosary while waiting for a bus, or a train, or in a restaurant queue, walking to and from one's work, etc., is an excellent means of fixing one's mind on God, as well as of making intercession for the men and women around, so many of whom know not 'the gift of God'. It is difficult at first to realise how many opportunities there are during the day for prayer—often no more than a few seconds, but they will suffice for a quick thought of God, and he, whose delight is to walk with the children of men, will not leave souls to struggle alone.

For to 'make time' deliberately and perseveringly, even in the face of great difficulties, is the work of man. But since God is never outdone in generosity he will ordinarily reward faithfulness not only by progress in prayer, but also by opportunities for extending the time given to it. It is always best to take our Lord at his

word. 'Ask and it shall be given unto you'—why not ask him for time for prayer—provided, of course, that it is his will for a soul to pray more? Just as in St Catherine's life he broke down the resistance of her parents so that she was left free to pray, he may do it for others, if he sees them determined to give all to him. But the gift must come from him, it must not be snatched; neglecting the duties of one's state for the sake of prayer would be the wrong way round and would lead only to illusion. The soul may surely trust the Holy Ghost to take care of her sanctification, for even if more time should not be given, he will find ways of uniting her to himself more closely even in the turmoil of the world.

Generally, however, the soul will find that more time is, in fact, granted, whether by a change of occupation or by a decrease in the demands of family and social life, or similar factors. There is also another way, though it needs prudence and the guidance of the spiritual director. It is a striking phenomenon in the lives of most mystics that they need extraordinary little sleep so that, though their days may have been filled with activities, their nights were for the greater part given over to prayer. Ordinary men and women cannot imitate them in this; but it is remarkable that even in the lower stages of contemplative prayer, once it becomes 'passive', less sleep is in fact needed; and the opinion has been advanced by spiritual writers that prayer, in such cases, takes as it were the place of sleep. As it is 'passive', reason and imagination as well as the body are at rest, and so the whole human being is refreshed, the more so as during the time of prayer the soul is close to the Source of all life and refreshment.

Here we touch on the most mysterious aspect of the time factor in the spiritual life: its relation with eternity. For the praying soul is in immediate contact with the Eternal, and the closer the union the stronger the impact of eternity on time in the human being. It is due to this impact that the soul in the higher states of the life of prayer, in full Union and Ecstasy, loses all consciousness of time, not as one absorbed in interesting work or reading—for there the loss is due to the effort of concentration, and despite it the person is always conscious of existing in time—but because it is invaded by another mode of being, by the Timeless, by Eternity. This invasion of the human soul by Eternity may perhaps offer an explanation of the extraordinary activities of some of the Saints mentioned in the beginning. When they first set out on their life of prayer they made time for God—but later God makes time for them. That does not mean that he adds more hours of sixty minutes each to their twenty-four hours' day. Time is a very mysterious

thing; sometimes it seems to 'stretch', at other times to 'contract'. The same hour of sixty minutes that seems incredibly short to the happy lover drags on interminably for the condemned criminal in his cell. And so—but this is put forward very tentatively and diffidently—God may in some mysterious way lengthen time for his servants, whose life is permeated by Eternity, so that filled with its power they are able to accomplish in an hour several times the amount of work that can normally be put into it by other persons. The more contemplative prayer becomes, the more the temporal life of the human being is invaded by Eternity, and, by a mysterious interplay, the time it has at its disposal is invested with something of the eternal quality of the Divine.

If man makes time for God, God will make time for man—ask and you shall receive. Except for rare cases progress in the spiritual life depends on a generous allowance of time set apart for God. As in human love the lover expects the beloved to give him as much time for being together as is compatible with her other duties, so God expects the loving soul to be 'together with him' in prayer as much as her circumstances allow. And, indeed, how can she desire to be together with him in Eternity, if she has not already desired to be together with him in time? Therefore Holy Scripture commands us to pray always, so that our souls may be so attuned to him in time that they will need no more preparation to be united to him for ever in the Eternal Now of the Beatific Vision.

FROM ST AUGUSTINE

Talibus hominibus infidelibus, impiis, iniquis, quod piget dicere; sed tamen dicam, nostis enim quam verum dicam, facilius placet pantomimus¹ quam Deus.—*Enarr. in Ps. XXXII—1.*

Qui si forte in ipso circo aliqua ex causa expavescant, continuo se signant.—*Enarr. in Ps. L—1.*

(Augustine frequently complains that the Church is deserted for the circus).

Such men—I hesitate their shame to tell—
 Yet I will speak, 'tis true, you know it well;
 Turn from the house of God, to feast their eyes.
 Upon a circus clown's obscenities.
 Yet should that place be swept with panic-flare,
 Quickly they'd cross themselves, and even there
 In the Devil's house send up a frantic prayer.

JOHN SEARLE

¹ Not a performance but a performer. The posturing and dancing of this 'pantomimus' was often most obscene.