

FIRESTONE OF DIVINE LOVE

Antonio Ruiz de Montoya

Antonio Ruiz de Montoya was once asked by his younger colleague and friend Francisco del Castillo about his method of prayer. Castillo was finding himself attracted to mystical prayer as a way of nourishing his own ministry to the most marginal in society: widows, orphans and black slaves. Montoya recognised in Castillo a kindred soul and decided to write for him a treatise on prayer, the Sílex del Divino Amor (Firestone of Divine Love). Castillo by then held the preconceived notion that mystical prayer was only for a few. But Montoya insisted that this was not the case: 'Whether you are a novice or apprentice in the spirit, an experienced exercitant, or whoever you are ... faith is not for one or the other, for this one or that one, it is for all ...' Montoya was by this time able to read Alvarez de Paz, whose writings were available in Jesuit communities, and in the Sílex del Divino Amor he further develops mystical theology as a practice that everyone can include in his or her daily life.

Chapter 30

SO YOU ARE TELLING ME that this exercise is not for novices, not for everyone. That way you can remain lukewarm about it. You claim that it is only for those invited to the king's wedding or only for the bride, to whom it was said 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away' (Song of Solomon 2:10). Or maybe it is only for those who cannot meditate any more, who get bored with discourse and whose imaginations resist images. It would be then for those who find rest only in solitude, only for those who become enraptured in knowledge and

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Guaraní image of a saint

love of the first Cause. You believe these are the signs that indicate that one should move to contemplative prayer. I think you are still wrong about it.

Let me tell you about a shortcut to reach that disposition to which you claim only a few are called. Whether you are a novice and apprentice in the spirit, or an expert exercitant, or whoever you are ... realise with your clear judgment that faith is not for one or the other, this one or that one, it is the same for all: 'without faith it is impossible to please God' (Hebrews 11:6).

A single act of trust is the

issue around which, as a spiritual person, you ought to form yourself. You are asked nothing else.

... So that you will be persuaded of how true it is that this exercise is for everyone, whether novice or expert in the practice of virtue and prayer, I want to remind you of that Ignatius, one of the indigenous leaders, whom you knew. During his fifty years as a gentile he respected natural law in his purity, happy with only one woman, without offending anyone. After receiving baptism at such a late age, he devoted himself to the study of divine law, which he applied to his memory and to his goodwill. His practice led him to Mass every day before going to work the land. When coming back into town, he would enter God's home before returning to his own. There, with affection and faith, he would adore the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. He received communion often, as it was his source and spring of grace. His prayer theme, discourse, and composition of place were simply to find God in all places. This single act of trust was his constant exercise. With

no other guide than the divine light, he grew so much in virtue that his deeds served as witness of his exemplary life.

Remember that in those days you desired to find a shortcut which would help you hold constantly in mind the presence of the first Cause. Now heaven wants you, 'expert' exercitant, to learn from this 'novice' in the faith's single act of trust.

One day after Mass, before you knew about the greatness of his spirit, he spoke to you without being addressed first. He said:

When I wake up I believe God is present. I rise keeping this in mind. I gather my family and lead them in prayer. Then I go to Mass, where I keep in my memory, through an act of trust, God's presence. With this same memory I return home. I lead my people into work. I accompany them. While doing my labours I never lose this memory along the way. On the trip home all my thoughts are on God's presence and how He is with me. I walk into church before reaching my house. There I worship the Lord and thank Him for his constant care. Full of joy I go back home in order to rest. At dinner I do not forget God's presence. The same while sleeping. This is my constant exercise.

This Indian, previously a gentile, lived and died in the same holy manner. His surrender into God, his tenderness and trustworthiness were such that to everyone he left a reminder of eternal salvation.

Now tell me if this exercise of an act of trust is for a few or for everyone. Your will should be resolute now. Apply yourself to examining your desires and concerns. Do not despair about previous worries or let yourself be led astray by memories of fleeting things. If a hundred times you forgot about God, return to Him with increased longing. All it will take is to deposit in an instant your mind in Him through a simple act.

Chapter 45

Everything God creates is created out of nothingness, drawn from God's infinite treasures. Reduce to nothingness everything you are, so that you will have your being in God and become divine. Your being is both body and soul. From both you must annihilate and renounce yourself into God, in a firm, unwavering, and irrevocable way. Your soul must be convinced that you are resolute about it. There is a test for this: no trace of attachment to things must remain. In freedom, spontaneously and joyfully, you will divest and detach from everything. This act will

guard you against temptations of any kind. If you truly do it, you will see how easily you can defend yourself against them and see them depart.

This act will unite you with God, more and more every day. If you unmake and annihilate yourself, God will make you divine. Through participation, God will transform your annihilation and nothingness into an infinite being, increasing in you His divine grace.

This act will also help you in contemplation. You have here a valuable offering to make. Since it will be too much to repeat the whole act, you will avail yourself of one phrase 'I renounce', by which you will refer to the entire act.

This phrase can be formed in three ways: vocally, mentally or even wordlessly, as separate souls and angels do. Do not worry about enumerating everything you are going to renounce, but bring yourself into one total renunciation of everything you may be attached to. If you worry about every single thing you will distract yourself from that intuition which must be the will's and the mind's only focus of attention. The understanding must not concern itself with discoursing, defining, arguing, or trying to know that which is incomprehensible. You ought to practise often the first two methods, vocal and mental, every day. Mental prayer can be trusted more if vocal prayer leads you to distraction. Begin by meditating about virtues and you will see the benefits that your spirit will derive from it. This way will then lead you into a state where, without needing vocal or mental words, you will be able, while engaged in work and interacting with others, to offer yourself to God as separate souls do. Now your will, with great delight and contentment, becomes satisfied if you have done this with full determination. You will learn the language of blessedness. You will realise that this spirituality and reduction of the soul is an incomprehensible treasure and a mine of immeasurable wealth.

Chapter 46

I make an offering to God. I renounce, in truth and with all the strength of my soul, every mundane honour or esteem that human beings can give me, whether true or false. I renounce vainglory, for I only seek divine glory and my entire annihilation. . . .

I renounce all worldly property, wealth and belongings; those I can have and those that I cannot. I desire to imitate the indescribable poverty of my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. As my only treasure I will

have God, whom I will serve with a naked spirit, without any attachment, not even to the least of ephemeral things

I renounce my memory so that it will be used as God's own memory, in everything that would be to God's service, delight and pleasure.

I renounce my understanding. I detach it from every natural and supernatural grasping so that, in my total nakedness and without sign or concept, I can reach a vague and confused notion of the incomprehensible God. In order to know God I wish my understanding, purified, clean and naked. I wish to serve and love God with all my soul, my heart and my understanding. I even detach myself from the desire and longing for this perfection, only wishing the fulfilment not of my anxious desire, but of the divine will.

I renounce my own will with all the strength of my desire. I wish not that my will be done but that it remains captive in the freedom of God's divine love, whom I wish to love with the greatest love that is possible. I wish to have the same love that the Virgin had and the same constant love that her holy Son has for his eternal Father. ...

To God all honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

translated by Juan Miguel Marin