

Remember that there are things which blemish perfect purity, without being in themselves downright acts of impurity. Anything which tends to lessen its intense sensitiveness, or to cast the slightest shadow over it, is of this nature; and all evil thoughts or foolish acts of levity or heedlessness are as steps toward the most direct breaches of the law of chastity. Avoid the society of persons who are wanting in purity, especially if they are bold, as indeed impure people always are. If a foul animal licks the sweet almond tree, its fruit becomes bitter; and so a corrupt pestilential man can scarcely hold communication with others, whether men or women, without damaging their perfect purity—their very glance is venomous, and their breath blighting like the basilisk. On the other hand, seek out good and pure men, read and ponder holy things; for the Word of God is pure, and it will make those pure who study it: wherefore David likens it to gold and precious stones.⁴⁷ Always abide close to Jesus Christ Crucified, both spiritually in meditation and actually in Holy Communion; for as all those who sleep upon the plant called *Agnus castus* become pure and chaste, so, if you rest your heart upon our Dear Lord, the Very Lamb, Pure and Immaculate, you will find that soon both heart and soul will be purified of all spot or stain.

Chapter XIV

ON POVERTY OF SPIRIT AMID RICHES

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God”;⁴⁸ and if so, woe be the rich in spirit, for theirs must be the bitterness of Hell. By rich in spirit I mean him whose riches engross his mind, or whose mind is buried in his riches. He is poor in spirit whose heart is not filled with the love of riches, whose mind is not set upon them. The halcyon builds its nest like a ball, and leaving but one little aperture in the upper part,

⁴⁷Ps. 119:127.

⁴⁸Matt. 5:3.

launches it on the sea, so secure and impenetrable, that the waves carry it along without any water getting in, and it floats on the sea, superior, so to say, to the waves. And this, my child, is what your heart should be—open only to Heaven, impenetrable to riches and earthly treasures. If you have them, keep your heart from attaching itself to them; let it maintain a higher level, and amid riches be as though you had none—superior to them. Do not let that mind which is the likeness of God cleave to mere earthly goods; let it always be raised above them, not sunk in them.

There is a wide difference between having poison and being poisoned. All apothecaries have poisons ready for special uses, but they are not consequently poisoned, because the poison is only in their shop, not in themselves; and so you may possess riches without being poisoned by them, so long as they are in your house or purse only, and not in your heart. It is the Christian's privilege to be rich in material things, and poor in attachment to them, thereby having the use of riches in this world and the merit of poverty in the next.

Of a truth, my daughter, no one will ever own themselves to be avaricious; everyone denies this contemptible vice—men excuse themselves on the plea of providing for their children, or plead the duty of prudent forethought; they never have too much, there is always some good reason for accumulating more; and even the most avaricious of men not only do not own to being such, but sincerely believe that they are not; and that because avarice is as a strong fever which is all the less felt as it rages most fiercely. Moses saw that sacred fire which burnt the bush without consuming it,⁴⁹ but the profane fire of avarice acts precisely the other way—it consumes the miser, but without burning, for, amid its most intense heat, he believes himself to be deliciously cool, and imagines his insatiable thirst to be merely natural and right.

If you long earnestly, anxiously, and persistently after what you do not possess, it is all very well to say that you do not wish to get it unfairly, but you are all the time guilty of avarice. He who longs eagerly and anxiously to drink, though it may be water only, thereby indicates that he is feverish. I hardly think we can say that

⁴⁹Exod. 3:2.

it is lawful to wish lawfully to possess that which is another's: so doing we surely wish our own gain at the expense of that other? and he who possesses anything lawfully, surely has more right to possess it, than we to obtain it? Why should we desire that which is his? Even were the wish lawful, it is not charitable, for we should not like other men to desire what we possess, however lawfully. This was Ahab's sin when he sought to acquire Naboth's vineyard by lawful purchase, when Naboth lawfully desired to keep it himself; he coveted it eagerly, continually, and anxiously, and so doing he displeased God.⁵⁰

Do not allow yourself to wish for that which is your neighbor's until he wishes to part with it. Then his wish will altogether justify yours, and I am quite willing that you should add to your means and possessions, provided it be not merely with strict justice, but kindly and charitably done.

If you cleave closely to your possessions, and are cumbered with them, setting your heart and thoughts upon them, and restlessly anxious lest you should suffer loss, then, believe me, you are still somewhat feverish; for fever patients drink the water we give them with an eagerness and satisfaction not common to those who are well.

It is not possible to take great pleasure in anything without becoming attached to it. If you lose property, and find yourself grievously afflicted at the loss, you may be sure that you were warmly attached to it; there is no surer proof of affection for the thing lost than our sorrow at its loss.

Therefore, do not fix your longings on anything which you do not possess; do not let your heart rest in that which you have; do not grieve overmuch at the losses which may happen to you; and then you may reasonably believe that although rich in fact, you are not so in affection, but that you are poor in spirit, and therefore blessed, for the Kingdom of Heaven is yours.

⁵⁰1 Kings 21.

Chapter XV

HOW TO EXERCISE REAL POVERTY, ALTHOUGH ACTUALLY RICH

The painter Parrhasius drew an ingenious and imaginative representation of the Athenians, ascribing sundry opposite qualities to them, calling them at once capricious, irascible, unjust, inconstant, courteous, merciful, compassionate, haughty, vainglorious, humble, boastful, and cowardly. And for my part, dear daughter, I would fain see united in your heart both riches and poverty, a great care and a great contempt for temporal things.

Do you take much greater pains than is the wont of worldly men to make your riches useful and fruitful? Are not the gardeners of a prince more diligent in cultivating and beautifying the royal gardens than if they were their own? Wherefore? Surely because these gardens are the king's, to whom his gardeners would fain render an acceptable service. My child, our possessions are not ours; God has given them to us to cultivate, that we may make them fruitful and profitable in His Service, and so doing we shall please Him. And this we must do more earnestly than worldly men, for they look carefully after their property out of self-love, and we must work for the love of God. Now self-love is a restless, anxious, overeager love; and so the work done on its behalf is troubled, vexatious, and unsatisfactory; whereas the Love of God is calm, peaceful, and tranquil, and so the work done for its Sake, even in worldly things, is gentle, trustful, and quiet. Let us take such a quiet care to preserve, and even when practicable to increase, our temporal goods, according to the duties of our position—this is acceptable to God for His Love's Sake.

But beware that you be not deceived by self-love, for sometimes it counterfeits the Love of God so cleverly that you may mistake one for the other. To avoid this, and to prevent a due care for your temporal interests from degenerating into avarice, it is needful often to practice a real poverty amid the riches with which God has endowed you.

To this end always dispose of a part of your means by giving them heartily to the poor; you impoverish yourself by whatever

you give away. It is true that God will restore it to you, not only in the next world, but in this, for nothing brings so much temporal prosperity as free almsgiving, but meanwhile, you are sensibly poorer for what you give. Truly that is a holy and rich poverty which results from almsgiving.

Love the poor and poverty—this love will make you truly poor, since, as Holy Scripture says, we become like to that we love.⁵¹ Love makes lovers equal. “Who is weak and I am not weak?”⁵² says St. Paul. He might have said, Who is poor and I am not poor? for it was love which made him like to those he loved; and so, if you love the poor, you will indeed share their poverty, and be poor like them.

And if you love the poor, seek them out, take pleasure in bringing them to your home, and in going to theirs, talk freely with them, and be ready to meet them, whether in Church or elsewhere. Let your tongue be poor with them in converse, but let your hands be rich to distribute out of your abundance. Are you prepared to go yet further, my child? not to stop at being poor like the poor, but even poorer still? The servant is not so great as his lord; do you be the servant of the poor, tend their sickbed with your own hands, be their cook, their needlewoman. O my daughter, such servitude is more glorious than royalty! How touchingly St. Louis, one of the greatest of kings, fulfilled this duty: serving the poor in their own houses, and daily causing three to eat at his own table, often himself eating the remains of their food in his loving humility. In his frequent visits to the hospitals he would select those afflicted with the most loathsome diseases, ulcers, cancer, and the like; and these he would tend, kneeling down and bareheaded, beholding the Savior of the world in them, and cherishing them with all the tenderness of a mother’s love. St. Elizabeth of Hungary used to mix freely with the poor, and liked to dress in their homely garments amid her gay ladies. Surely these royal personages were poor amid their riches and rich in poverty.

⁵¹“Their abominations were according as they loved” (Hos. 9:10).

⁵²2 Cor. 11:29.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. In the Day of Judgment the King of prince and peasant will say to them, “I was hungry, and ye gave Me meat, I was naked, and ye clothed Me; come, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”⁵³

Everybody finds themselves sometimes deficient in what they need, and put to inconvenience. A guest whom we would fain receive honorably arrives, and we cannot entertain him as we would; we want our costly apparel in one place, and it all happens to be somewhere else; all the wine in our cellar suddenly turns sour; we find ourselves accidentally in some country place where everything is wanting—room, bed, food, attendance. In short, the richest people may easily be without something they want, and that is practically to suffer poverty. Accept such occurrences cheerfully, rejoice in them, bear them willingly.

Again, if you are impoverished much or little by unforeseen events, such as storm, flood, fire, drought, theft, or lawsuit, then is the real time to practice poverty, accepting the loss quietly, and adapting yourself patiently to your altered circumstances. Esau and Jacob both came to their father with hairy hands,⁵⁴ but the hair on Jacob’s hands did not grow from his skin, and could be torn off without pain; while that on Esau’s hands, being the natural growth of his skin, he would have cried out and resisted if anyone had torn it off. So if our possessions are very close to our heart, and storm or thief tear them away, we shall break forth in impatient murmurs and lamentations. But if we only cleave to them with that solicitude which God wills us to have, and not with our whole heart, we shall see them rent away without losing our sense of calmness. This is just the difference between the clothing of men and beasts; the beast’s clothing grows on its flesh, and man’s is only laid on so that it may be laid aside at will.

⁵³Matt. 25:34–36.

⁵⁴Gen. 27.

Chapter XVI

HOW TO POSSESS A RICH SPIRIT AMID REAL POVERTY

But if you are really poor, my daughter, for God's sake be so in spirit; make a virtue of necessity, and turn that precious stone poverty to its true value. The brilliancy thereof is not perceived in this world, but nevertheless it is very great.

Patience then! you are in good company. Our Dear Lord, Our Lady, the Apostles, numberless Saints, both men and women, were poor, and although they might have been rich, disdained to be so. How many great ones of this world have gone through many difficulties to seek holy poverty amid hospitals and cloisters! What pains they took to find it, let St. Alexis, St. Paula, St. Paulinus, St. Angela, and many another witness; whereas to you, my child, it has come unasked—you have met poverty without seeking it—do you then embrace it as the beloved friend of Jesus Christ, Who was born, lived, and died in poverty, and cherished it all His Life.

There are two great privileges connected with your poverty, through which you may acquire great merit. First, it is not your own choice, but God's Will alone, which has made you poor. Now, whatever we accept simply because it is God's Will is acceptable in His Sight, so long as we accept it heartily and out of love—the less of self the more of God—and a single-hearted acceptance of God's Will purifies any suffering very greatly.

The second privilege is that this poverty is so very poor. There is a be-praised, caressed poverty, so petted and cared for, that it can hardly be called poor like the despised, condemned, neglected poverty which also exists. Now, most secular poverty is of this last kind, for those who are involuntarily poor, and cannot help themselves, are not much thought of, and for that very reason their poverty is poorer than that of Religious, although religious poverty has a very special and excellent grace, through the intention and the vow by which it is accepted.

Do not complain then of your poverty, my daughter. We only complain of that which is unwelcome, and if poverty is unwell-

come to you, you are no longer poor in spirit. Do not fret under such assistance as is needful; therein lies one great grace of poverty. It were overambitious to aim at being poor without suffering any inconvenience, in other words, to have the credit of poverty and the convenience of riches.

Do not be ashamed of being poor, or of asking alms. Receive what is given you with humility, and accept a refusal meekly. Frequently call to mind Our Lady's journey into Egypt with her Holy Child, and of all the poverty, contempt, and suffering they endured. If you follow their example you will indeed be rich amid your poverty.

Chapter XVII

ON FRIENDSHIP: EVIL AND FRIVOLOUS FRIENDSHIP

Foremost among the soul's affections is love. Love is the ruler of every motion of the heart; drawing all to itself, and making us like to that we love. Beware, then, my daughter, of harboring any evil affection, or you, too, will become evil. And friendship is the most dangerous of all affections, because any other love may exist without much mental communication, but as friendship is founded thereon, it is hardly possible to be closely bound by its ties to anyone without sharing in his qualities.

All love is not friendship, for one may love without any return, and friendship implies mutual love. Further, those who are bound by such affection must be conscious that it is reciprocal—otherwise there may be love but not friendship—and moreover, there must be something communicated between the friends as a solid foundation of friendship.

Friendship varies according to these communications, and they vary according to that which people have to communicate. If men share false and vain things, their friendship will be false and vain; if that which is good and true, their friendship will be good and true, and the better that which is the staple of the bond, so much

the better will the friendship be. That honey is best which is culled from the choicest flowers, and so friendship built upon the highest and purest intercommunion is the best. And just as a certain kind of honey brought from Pontus is poisonous, being made from aconite, so that those who eat it lose their senses, so the friendship which is based on unreal or evil grounds will itself be hollow and worthless.

Mere sensual intercourse is not worthy of the name of friendship; and were there nothing more in married love it would not deserve to bear the name; but inasmuch as that involves the participation of life, industry, possessions, affections, and an unalterable fidelity, marriage, when rightly understood, is a very real and holy friendship.

Whatever is founded on mere sensuality, vanity, or frivolity, is unworthy to be called friendship. I mean such attractions as are purely external, a sweet voice, personal beauty, and the cleverness or outward show which have great weight with some. You will often hear women and young people unhesitatingly decide that such a one is very delightful, very admirable, because he is good-looking, well dressed, sings, or dances, or talks well. Even charlatans esteem the wittiest clown among them as their best man. But all these things are purely sensual, and the connections built on such foundation must be vain and frivolous, more fitly to be called trifling than friendship. They spring up chiefly among young people, who are easily fascinated by personal attractions, dress, and gossip—friendships in which the tailor and hairdresser have the chief part. How can such friendships be other than short-lived, melting away like snow wreaths in the sun!

Chapter XVIII

ON FRIVOLOUS ATTACHMENTS

Such foolish attachments between man and woman without any matrimonial intentions as are called *amourettes*—mere abortions, or rather phantoms, of friendship—must not, idle and empty as they are, profane the name of friendship or love. Yet such frivo-

lous, contemptible attractions often snare the hearts of both men and women, and although they may end in downright sin, there is no such intention on the part of their victims, who consciously do but yield to foolish trifling and toying. Some such have no object beyond the actual indulgence of a passing inclination; others are excited by vanity, which takes pleasure in captivating hearts; some are stimulated by a combination of both these motives. But all such friendships are evil, hollow, and vain; evil, in that they often lead to sinful deeds, and draw the heart from God, and from the husband or wife who is its lawful owner; hollow, in that they are baseless and without root; vain, in that neither gain, honor, nor satisfaction can come from such. On the contrary, nothing comes of them but a loss of time and credit, and unreasoning excitement, mistrust, jealousy, and perturbation.

St. Gregory Nazianzen speaks very wisely on this subject, admonishing vain women, and his words are equally applicable to men: "Your natural beauty will suffice your husband, but if it is exhibited to all, like a net spread before birds, what will be the end? You will be taken by whoever admires you, looks and glances will be exchanged, smiles and tender words, at first hesitatingly exchanged, but soon more boldly given and received. Far be it from me to describe the end, but this much I will say, nothing said or done by young men and women under such circumstances but is perilous. One act of levity leads to another, as the links in a chain." They who tamper with such things will fall into the trap. They fancy that they only mean to amuse themselves, but will not go too far. Little you know, forsooth! The tiny spark will burst into a flame, and, overpowering your heart, it will reduce your good resolutions to ashes, and your reputation to smoke. "Who will pity a charmer that is bitten with a serpent?" asks the Wise Man,⁵⁵ and with him I ask, Do you, in your folly, imagine that you can lightly handle love as you please? You think to trifle with it, but it will sting you cruelly, and then everyone will mock you, and laugh at your foolish pretension to harbor a venomous serpent in your bosom, which has poisoned and lost alike your honor and your soul.

⁵⁵Eccles. 12:13.

What fatal blindness this to stake all that is most precious to man! Yes, I say it advisedly, for God desires to have us only for the sake of our soul, or the soul through our will, and our will for love's sake. Surely we have not by any means a sufficient store of love to offer God, and yet in our madness and folly we lavish and waste it on vain, frivolous objects, as though we had enough and to spare. Our Dear Lord, Who demands naught save our love in return for our creation, preservation, and redemption, will require a strict account of the senseless way in which we have frittered and wasted it. If He will call us to account for idle words, how will it be with respect to idle, foolish, pernicious friendships?

Husbandmen know that the walnut tree is very harmful in a vineyard or field, because it absorbs the fatness of the land and draws it away from the other crops; its thick foliage overshadows and deprives them of sunshine; and, moreover, it attracts passersby, who tread down and spoil all that is around while striving to gather its fruit. So with these foolish love affairs and the soul; they engross it, so that it is unable to bring forth good works; their superfluous foliage—flirtations, dallings, and idle talk—consumes profitable time; and, moreover, they lead to so many temptations, distractions, suspicions, and the like, that the heart becomes altogether crushed and spoiled. Such follies not only banish Heavenly Love, they likewise drive out the fear of God, enervate the mind, and damage reputation. They may be the plaything of courts, but assuredly they are as a plague spot of the heart.⁵⁶

Chapter XIX

OF REAL FRIENDSHIP

Do you, my child, love everyone with the pure love of Charity, but have no friendship save with those whose intercourse is good and true, and the purer the bond which unites you, so much

⁵⁶*"C'est en un mot le jouet des cours, mais la peste des coeurs."*

higher will your friendship be. If your intercourse is based on science it is praiseworthy, still more if it arises from a participation in goodness, prudence, justice, and the like; but if the bond of your mutual liking be charity, devotion, and Christian perfection, God knows how very precious a friendship it is! Precious because it comes from God, because it tends to God, because God is the link that binds you, because it will last forever in Him. Truly it is a blessed thing to love on earth as we hope to love in Heaven, and to begin that friendship here which is to endure forever there. I am not now speaking of simple charity, a love due to all mankind, but of that spiritual friendship which binds souls together, leading them to share devotions and spiritual interests, so as to have but one mind between them. Such as these may well cry out, "Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is, brethren, to dwell together in unity!"⁵⁷ Even so, for the "precious ointment" of devotion trickles continually from one heart to the other, so that truly we may say that to such friendship the Lord promises His Blessing and life forevermore.

To my mind all other friendship is but as a shadow with respect to this, its links mere fragile glass compared to the golden bond of true devotion. Do you form no other friendships. I say "form," because you have no right to cast aside or neglect the natural bonds which draw you to relations, connections, benefactors, or neighbors. My rules apply to those you deliberately choose to make. There are some who will tell you that you should avoid all special affection or friendship, as likely to engross the heart, distract the mind, excite jealousy, and whatnot. But they are confusing things. They have read in the works of saintly and devout writers that individual friendships and special intimacies are a great hindrance in the religious life, and therefore they suppose it to be the same with all the world, which is not at all the case. Whereas in a well-regulated community everyone's aim is true devotion, there is no need for individual intercourse, which might exceed due limits; in the world those who aim at a devout life require to be united one with another by a holy friendship, which

⁵⁷Ps. 133:1.

excites, stimulates, and encourages them in well-doing. Just as men traversing a plain have no need to hold one another up, as they have who are amid slippery mountain paths, so Religious do not need the stay of individual friendships; but those who are living in the world require such for strength and comfort amid the difficulties which beset them. In the world all have not one aim, one mind, and therefore we must take to us congenial friends, nor is there any undue partiality in such attachments, which are but as the separation of good from evil, the sheep from the goats, the bee from the drone—a necessary separation.

No one can deny that our Dear Lord loved St. John, Lazarus, Martha, Magdalene, with a specially tender friendship, since we are told so in Holy Scripture; and we know that St. Paul dearly loved St. Mark, St. Petronilla, as St. Paul, Timothy, and Thecla.⁵⁸ St. Gregory Nazianzen boasts continually of his friendship with the great St. Basil, of which he says: "It seemed as though with two bodies we had but one soul, and if we may not believe those who say that all things are in all else, at least one must affirm that we were two in one, and one in two—the only object that both had being to grow in holiness, and to mold our present life to our future hopes, thereby forsaking this mortal world before our death." And St. Augustine says that St. Ambrose loved St. Monica by reason of her many virtues, and that she in return loved him as an Angel of God.

What need to affirm so unquestionable a fact! St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Gregory, St. Bernard, and all the most notable servants of God have had special friendships, which in nowise hindered their perfection. St. Paul, in describing evil men, says that they were "without natural affection,"⁵⁹ i.e., without friendship.

⁵⁸St. Thecla (Virgin Martyr) was a native of Lycaonia, converted (so say St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Epiphanius, and others of the Fathers) by St. Paul, who kindled so strong a love of virginity in her heart that she broke off her intended marriage and devoted herself to Christ. She is said to have followed St. Paul in several of his journeys, and a very ancient Martyrology, which bears the name of St. Jerome, published by Florentinus, says that she was miraculously delivered unharmed from the persecutors' flames at Rome. It seems doubtful whether she died a natural or a martyr's death. The first Christian Emperors built a great Church at Seleucia, where she died.

⁵⁹Rom. 1:31.

And St. Thomas, in common with other philosophers, acknowledges that friendship is a virtue, and he certainly means individual friendships, because he says that we cannot bestow perfect friendship on many persons. So we see that the highest grace does not lie in being without friendships, but in having none which are not good, holy, and true.

Chapter XX

OF THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE FRIENDSHIP

Take notice, my child, that the honey of Heraclium, which is so poisonous, altogether resembles that which is wholesome, and there is great danger of mistaking one for the other, or of mixing them, for the virtue of one would not counteract the harmfulness of the other. We must be on our guard not to be deceived in making friendships, especially between persons of the opposite sexes, for not infrequently Satan deludes those who love one another. They may begin with a virtuous affection, but if discretion be lacking, frivolity will creep in, and then sensuality, till their love becomes carnal; even in spiritual love there is a danger if people are not on the watch, although it is not so easy to be deluded therein, inasmuch as the very purity and transparency of spiritual affection show Satan's stains more promptly. Consequently, when he seeks to interpose, he does it stealthily, and strives to insinuate impurity almost imperceptibly.

You may distinguish between worldly friendship and that which is good and holy, just as one distinguishes that poisonous honey from what is good—it is sweeter to the taste than ordinary honey, owing to the aconite infused; and so worldly friendship is profuse in honeyed words, passionate endearments, commendations of beauty and sensual charms, while true friendship speaks a simple honest language, lauding naught save the Grace of God, its one only foundation.

That strange honey causes giddiness; and so false friendship

upsets the mind, makes its victim to totter in the ways of purity and devotion, inducing affected, mincing looks, sensual caresses, inordinate sighings, petty complaints of not being loved, slight but questionable familiarities, gallantries, embraces, and the like, which are sure precursors of evil; whereas true friendship is modest and straightforward in every glance, loving and pure in caresses, has no sighs save for Heaven, no complaints save that God is not loved sufficiently. That honey confuses the sight, and worldly friendship confuses the judgment, so that men think themselves right while doing evil, and assume their excuses and pretexts to be valid reasoning. They fear the light and love darkness; but true friendship is clear-sighted, and hides nothing—rather seeks to be seen of good men. Lastly, this poisonous honey leaves an exceeding bitter taste behind; and so false friendship turns to evil desires, upbraidings, slander, deceit, sorrow, confusion, and jealousies, too often ending in downright sin; but pure friendship is always the same—modest, courteous, and loving—knowing no change save an increasingly pure and perfect union, a type of the blessed friendships of Heaven.

When young people indulge in looks, words, or actions which they would not like to be seen by their parents, husbands, or Confessors, it is a sure sign that they are damaging their conscience and their honor. Our Lady was troubled⁶⁰ when the Angel appeared to her in human form, because she was alone, and he spoke to her with flattering although heavenly words. O Savior of the world, if purity itself fears an Angel in human shape, how much more need that our impurity should fear men, although they take the likeness of an Angel, if they speak words of earthliness and sensuality!

⁶⁰Luke 1:29.

Chapter XXI

REMEDIES AGAINST EVIL FRIENDSHIPS

How are you to meet the swarm of foolish attachments, triflings, and undesirable inclinations which beset you? By turning sharply away, and thoroughly renouncing such vanities, flying to the Savior's Cross, and clasping His Crown of thorns to your heart, so that these little foxes may not spoil your vines.⁶¹ Beware of entering into any manner of treaty with the Enemy; do not delude yourself by listening to him while intending to reject him. For God's sake, my daughter, be firm on all such occasions; the heart and ear are closely allied, and just as you would vainly seek to check the downward course of a mountain torrent, so difficult will you find it to keep the smooth words which enter in at the ear from finding their way down into the heart. Alcmeon says (what indeed Aristotle denies) that the goat breathes through its ears, not its nostrils. I know not whether this be so, but one thing I know, that our heart breathes through the ear, and that while it exhales its own thoughts through the mouth, it inhales those of others by the ear. Let us then carefully guard our ears against evil words which would speedily infect the heart. Never hearken to any indiscreet conversation whatsoever—never mind if you seem rude and discourteous in rejecting all such. Always bear in mind that you have dedicated your heart to God, and offered your love to Him; so that it were sacrilege to deprive Him of one particle thereof. Do you rather renew the offering continually by fresh resolutions, entrenching yourself therein as in a fortress. Cry out to God, He will succor you, and His Love will shelter you, so that all your love may be kept for Him only.

If unhappily you are already entangled in the nets of any unreal affection, truly it is hard to set you free! But place yourself before His Divine Majesty, acknowledge the depth of your wretchedness, your weakness and vanity, and then with all the earnestness of purpose you can muster, arrest the budding evil, abjure your own empty promises, and renounce those you have

⁶¹Cant. 2:15.

received, and resolve with a firm, absolute will never again to indulge in any trifling or dallying with such matters.

If you can remove from the object of your unworthy affection, it is most desirable to do so. He who has been bitten by a viper cannot heal his wound in the presence of another suffering from the like injury, and so one bitten with a false fancy will not shake it off while near to his fellow victim. Change of scene is very helpful in quieting the excitement and restlessness of sorrow or love. St. Ambrose tells a story, in his Book Two of *On Penitence*, of a young man, who coming home after a long journey quite cured of a foolish attachment, met the unworthy object of his former passion, who stopped him, saying, "Do you not know me, I am still myself?" "That may be," was the answer, "but I am not myself"—so thoroughly and happily was he changed by absence. And St. Augustine tells us how, after the death of his dear friend, he soothed his grief by leaving Thagaste and going to Carthage.

But what is he to do, who cannot try this remedy? To such I would say, abstain from all private intercourse, all tender glances and smiles, and from every kind of communication which can feed the unholy flame. If it be necessary to speak at all, express clearly and tersely the eternal renunciation on which you have resolved. I say unhesitatingly to whosoever has become entangled in any such worthless love affairs, Cut it short, break it off—do not play with it, or pretend to untie the knot; cut it through, tear it asunder. There must be no dallying with an attachment which is incompatible with the Love of God.

But, you ask, after I have thus burst the chains of my unholy bondage, will no traces remain, and shall I not still carry the scars on my feet—that is, in my wounded affections? Not so, my child, if you have attained a due abhorrence of the evil; in that case all you will feel is an exceeding horror of your unworthy affection, and all appertaining thereto; no thought will linger in your breast concerning it save a true love of God. Or if, by reason of the imperfection of your repentance, any evil inclinations still hover round you, seek such a mental solitude as I have already described, retire into it as much as possible, and then by repeated efforts and ejaculations renounce your evil desires; abjure them heartily; read pious books more than is your wont; go more frequently to Confession and Communion; tell your Director simply and humbly

all that tempts and troubles you, if you can, or at all events take counsel with some faithful, wise friend. And never doubt but that God will set you free from all evil passions, if you are steadfast and devout on your part. Perhaps you will say that it is unkind, ungrateful, thus pitilessly to break off a friendship. Surely it were a happy unkindness which is acceptable to God; but of a truth, my child, you are committing no unkindness, rather conferring a great benefit on the person you love, for you break his chains as well as your own, and although at the moment he may not appreciate his gain, he will do so by and by, and will join you in thanksgiving. "Thou, Lord, hast broken my bonds in sunder. I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the Name of the Lord."⁶²

Chapter XXII

FURTHER ADVICE CONCERNING INTIMACIES

Friendship demands very close correspondence between those who love one another, otherwise it can never take root or continue. And together with the interchange of friendship, other things imperceptibly glide in, and a mutual giving and receiving of emotions and inclinations takes place; especially when we esteem the object of our love very highly, because then we so entirely open our heart to him, that his influence rules us altogether, whether for good or evil. The bees which make that oriental honey of which I spoke, seek to gather naught save honey, but with it they suck up the poisonous juices of the aconite on which they light. So here, my child, we must bear in mind what our Savior said about putting out our money to the exchangers;⁶³ we must seek to make a good exchange, not receiving bad money and good alike, and learning to distinguish that which is valuable from what is worthless, since scarcely anyone is free from some imper-

⁶²Ps. 116:14, 15.

⁶³Matt. 25:27.

fection, nor is there any reason why we should adopt all our friend's faults as well as his friendship.

Of course, we should love him notwithstanding his faults, but without loving those faults; true friendship implies an interchange of what is good, not what is evil. As men who drag the river Tagus sift the gold from its sands and throw the latter back upon the shore, so true friends should sift the sand of imperfections and reject it. St. Gregory Nazianzen tells us how certain persons who loved and admired St. Basil were led to imitate even his external blemishes, his slow, abstracted manner of speaking, the cut of his beard, and his peculiar gait. And so we see husbands and wives, children, friends, who, by reason of their great affection for one another, acquire—either accidentally or designedly—many foolish little ways and tricks peculiar to each. This ought not to be; for everyone has enough imperfections of their own without adding those of anybody else, and friendship requires no such thing; on the contrary, it rather constrains us to help one another in getting rid of all sorts of imperfections. Of course we should bear with our friend's infirmities, but we should not encourage them, much less copy them.

Of course I am speaking of imperfections only, for, as to sins, we must neither imitate nor tolerate these in our friends. That is but a sorry friendship which would see a friend perish, and not try to save him; would watch him dying of an abscess without daring to handle the knife of correction which would save him. True and living friendship cannot thrive amid sin. There is a tradition that the salamander extinguishes any fire into which it enters, and so sin destroys friendship. Friendship will banish a casual sin by brotherly correction, but if the sin be persistent, friendship dies out—it can only live in a pure atmosphere. Much less can true friendship ever lead anyone into sin; our friend becomes an enemy if he seeks to do so, and deserves to lose our friendship, and there is no surer proof of the hollowness of friendship than its profession between evildoers. If we love a vicious person, our friendship will be vicious, too; it will be like those to whom it is given.

Those who draw together for mere temporal profit have no right to call their union friendship; it is not for love of one another that they unite, but for love of gain.

There are two sayings in Holy Scripture on which all Christian friendship should be built—that of the Wise Man, "Whoso feareth the Lord shall direct his friendship aright";⁶⁴ and that of St. James, "The friendship of the world is enmity with God."⁶⁵

Chapter XXIII

ON THE PRACTICE OF BODILY MORTIFICATION

It has been said that if one writes a word on an almond, and then replaces it carefully in its husk, and sows it, all the fruit borne by that tree will be marked by the word so inscribed. For my own part, I never could approve of beginning to reform anyone by merely external things—dress, the arrangement of hair, and outward show. On the contrary, it seems to me that one should begin from within. "Turn ye to Me with all your heart";⁶⁶ "My son, give Me thine heart";⁶⁷ for as the heart is the fount whence all our actions spring, they will be according to what it is. And the Heavenly Bridegroom, calling the soul, says, "Set Me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm."⁶⁸ Yes verily, for whosoever has Jesus Christ in his heart will soon show it in all his external actions. Therefore, my daughter, above all things I would write that precious and Holy Name JESUS in your heart, certain that having done so, your life—like the almond tree in the fable—will bear the stamp of that Saving Name in every act; and if the Dear Lord dwells within your heart, He will live in your every action, and will be traced in every member and part of you, so that you will be able to say with St. Paul, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth

⁶⁴Eccles. 6:17.

⁶⁵James 4:4.

⁶⁶Joel 2:12.

⁶⁷Prov. 23:26.

⁶⁸Cant. 8:6.