

BLESSED ARE THE PURE OF HEART

BY

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ALL those who would re-enter Paradise must first be tried by fire', says St Ambrose.¹ Thus the soul which aspires to the earthly Paradise of union with God in contemplation must necessarily be purified, for only the pure of heart can see God. Thus purification both of the senses and of the mind, says Père Garrigou-Lagrange,² is caused by a special breathing of the Holy Spirit whose working here becomes manifest in the Gifts of knowledge, Filial Fear and Fortitude for the purification of the senses, and the Gift of Understanding for the purification of the mind.

KNOWLEDGE shows experimentally the nothingness of creatures, both within and outside ourselves. It differs from Wisdom in that we see created things in their proximate cause (i.e., failures and imperfections) and not in the Supreme Cause. This Knowledge of the nothingness of created things is meant to lead us to the desire of God alone.

FILIAL FEAR is the Gift which inspires the soul with the fear of being unfaithful, and in spite of the sensitive nature being greatly depressed, weak and sluggish in good works by reason of the lack of attraction, the spirit is ready and strong. It is also this Gift which strengthens and guides the soul through severe temptations against chastity and patience.

FORTITUDE fills the soul with determination to stand firm in spite of all difficulties and to continue to serve God cost what it may. 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice for they shall be filled'. (Matth. v. 6.)

UNDERSTANDING. St Thomas tells us (II-IIa. 8, ad 1) 'the word *intellectus* (understanding) implies an intimate knowledge, for *intelligere* (to understand) is the same as *intus legere* (to read inwardly). Since, however, human knowledge begins with the outside of things as it were, it is evident that the stronger the light of the understanding, the further can it penetrate into the heart of things. Now the natural light of our understanding is of finite power; wherefore it can but reach to a certain fixed point. Consequently man needs a supernatural light in order to penetrate further still, so as to know what it cannot know by its natural light: and this supernatural light which is bestowed on man is called the Gift of Understanding. Since man is ordained to supernatural happiness he needs to reach to certain

1 In Ps. 118, *sermo* 20.

2 *Les Trois Ages*. t. 2.

higher truths for which he requires the Gift of Understanding'.

It is called 'understanding' and not 'reason' because it is superior to reasoning; it is the principle of intuitive knowledge, simple and penetrating as a shaft of light. It perfects a living faith. It is not the result of study—it proceeds from a special illumination of the Holy Spirit—which, not in an abstract or theoretical manner, but with a vital, concrete and practical force, penetrates into the depths of the soul, underlining the immense distance that lies between words and symbols on the one hand and the spiritual realities they represent on the other. It prevents any confusion between sensible consolation and purely spiritual gifts.

The Gift of Understanding does not only prevent error but penetrates in a vital manner to the inner depths of the truths of Faith, especially those which are above the reach of the reason; not that it explains these mysteries but in the obscurity of faith it enlightens the soul with a penetrating glance difficult to put into words. Under strong temptation to discouragement and even despair this gift keeps the soul conscious of its final end and the reward of eternal life. It also removes a certain dullness of mind and so enables us to see ourselves far better than by formal examens of conscience.

It purifies the soul by lifting it above sensible images and error, and together with the Gift of Knowledge it raises the soul to infused contemplation, i.e., a penetrating and sure act of faith which is nothing else than a special breathing of the Holy Spirit; an act secret, peaceful and loving, which is nevertheless obscure, and the cause of suffering, because the mind left outside this purely spiritual act seeks its own satisfaction and finds nothing. The stars in this night are the occasional enlightenment of the mind on truths of faith and passages in the Gospels.

The temptations against chastity and patience which accompany this state of prayer are meant by God to elicit intense, often heroic, acts of the contrary virtues which root in the very depths of the soul the guidance of right reason over the senses, and the divine life of grace in the acquired moral virtues. The very intensity of the acts which are made increases immediately the virtues in question. The soul learns her own misery by these temptations and other trials and the need she has of the prayer of petition. Thus are we taught to distrust ourselves and to depend on God alone and on the help given by our Lady and the saints when we beg their aid in our distress.

As during the night the eye does not see objects which are close at hand but does see the stars which are millions of miles away, so in this darkness of soul we do not see or taste the human working of the mind, but the spiritual eye is gradually trained to see the infinity of God and in contrast with the sight of God's greatness we see our own

misery more clearly. Before we can see the stars of divine truth we have to learn to walk bravely in the night of faith. The spiritual eye is purified by temptations against faith and hope and humility; exterior trials and mortifications are sent by God himself who knows, as no one else can, the depths that have to be reached by the purifying fire. Tauler says that the Holy Spirit creates a great emptiness in the depths of the soul where there still cling remains of pride and selfishness. This emptiness is a healing and it increases the soul's capacity to receive. (2nd sermon for Pentecost.)

The purifying light of the Gift of Understanding seems to darken the mind because the spiritual soul is being introduced into the region of divine mysteries which are obscurity to the mind; for the soul, in this life, must always live by faith, and unless the Gift of Wisdom is also influencing the soul there is no sweetness but only cloud and suffering. For the Light Inaccessible where God dwells is darkness to the weak powers of the soul which is now living above the ordinary power of reasoning, and therefore as it were paralysed, yet conscious of the divine influence working through this Gift. The lower powers of the soul, i.e., those which depend on reasoning for knowledge, are obscured, while the higher powers, i.e., the purely spiritual intellect and will are enlightened and, by this obscure light, united to God.

Faith unites the soul directly to God, the Gift of Understanding works always in the realm of faith; its light does not remove the obscurity of faith, but the union is experimental.

M A R G E R Y K E M P E

H E R D A Y S A N D O U R S

BY

ALBERT HADSHAR

RECORDS and diaries of individuals, especially of such as this creature' Margery, reveal both highlights and shadows, black chaos on either side of the mountains of youth. In this long-forgotten book of Margery Kempe the slightest innuendo, the merest agitation, the unbalanced phrase, the flicker of surprise each in its own allusive manner betrays some chosen subject for human enquiry and scholarship above all others and sweeter in the discovery than the gums and vineyards of Engaddi. Like Christina Mirabilis—the surprising character who lived two centuries before Margery—this burgher's wife has been called the 'Astounding'. The Philosopher's happy phrase *admiratio est delectationis causa* may then be our invitation to share the medieval experiences of one whose delights were found in the homesteads, and