

FENELON ON MEDITATION AND PRAYER.

Read over the subject of your meditation, either in the Bible or whatever book you may be using. Pause, after a verse or two, to follow out such reflections as God may suggest. Consider how Jesus Christ practised the truth or the precept which he is teaching you; how those faithful souls whom you yourself know are practising it; how the world neglects it; how you have departed from it, and why. Then lay your shame before God, prostrating before him in the solitude of your closet. Then reflect upon the occasions which cause you to commit the same faults, and the best means of avoiding and remedying them; what the Lord justly requires of you, that you may keep from such falls, and repair the past; pray Him to fill your heart with all that He would see in it; ask Him to strengthen the determination to improve, which He has given you; trust in His goodness, and in His solemn promises never to forsake us in time of need; and rest in the hope that He will finish the good work which He has begun in you.

In order to make this plain to you, I will give you an illustration of my meaning. Suppose the subject of your meditation to be the first words of the seventeenth chapter of St. John, which I was studying just before I began to write to you: Jesus Christ, addressing his Father, and saying, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do."

Consider what is meant by glorifying God on the earth. Jesus Christ explains it clearly in the words, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do. So that to glorify God we must know and perform that which He gives us to do. Every one has his own work, and every one follows it out, but not always that work which God has given him to do. All the work which I undertake from vanity, from a desire to get on in the world, from temper, fancy, taste, self-will, or human respect, is not that which God has given me to do, and consequently none of this can glorify Him; all such is the work of the world, the flesh, or the Devil.

The work which God has given me to do is to amend whatever is amiss in my natural disposition,—that is what He would have me do; correct my faults, sanctify my thoughts and desires, become more patient, more meek and lowly of heart. This, Madame, is your work; and to bring up your family solely for Him, to train it in indifference to the world, in gentleness, patience, modesty, and a real love of God. Examine whether you are doing this, and how you are doing it. Consider what the saints have done, and are still setting before you as an example every day. The work which God gave them to do was often much harder than that which He gives you. They had fewer means and helps towards accomplishing it than you have; they were as weak, and subject to as many difficulties and hindrances, yet they achieved their end.

I speak and act on behalf of the Devil whenever I say or do that which is prompted by any evil temper; I set forward his work, and overthrow that of the Lord within me, the work which He has begun by giving me a will and wish to do better. Gentleness is Thy work, my God, and it is the work Thou hast given me to do. I cannot glorify Thee, save by striving after and fulfilling it in myself.

O God, am I called to put up with being badly served? I will do so gladly, if only I can thereby serve Thee well. My work is not to be well served, but to serve Thee well, to be gentle and patient under all that disturbs me. There are a thousand like matters in daily life, which I cannot enumerate here, but which you can see for yourself how to deal with, so as to seek in prayer for strength from God to amend what is amiss, and confirm what is good. Everything which we see in the world can serve to keep us in the presence.

Do not trust to your good intentions if they are barren and without result. Labor bravely to become gentle and humble of heart. If something is done amiss which only affects you personally, and what is due to yourself, bear it without saying anything. If any hasty word has escaped you, after inward humiliation for it, make amends by speaking kindly, and doing some little act of kindness, if possible, to those whom you have treated rudely. Never forget how God has dealt and does deal with you continually, how gently and patiently. Let that be your example; learn from Him how to deal with others. Do not be disheartened by your falls. Inasmuch as they clearly point out your weak places, they ought to make you more humble, and more diligent in self-watchfulness, and in constant recourse to God as a means of preservation.

FENELON: ON PRAYER IN LIFE

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ON KEEPING SILENCE.

Be sure that humility, frequent silence and recollection, will do you more good than any amount of anxiety and self-chosen austerities. Silence is, above all, important for you. Even when you cannot withdraw from society, you might often practise silence, and let others take the lead in conversation. There is no way by which you can so effectively subdue your haughty, disdainful contemptuous spirit, as by bridling it with silence.

Keep a strict watch upon your tongue. The presence of God, which restrains your words will likewise keep all your thoughts and wishes in check. But this work must be accomplished gradually. Be patient with yourself as well as with others.

ON SILENCE AND RECOLLECTION

I think, Madame, that you should try hard now to practise silence, so far as general courtesy will permit. Silence promotes the presence of God, prevents many harsh and proud words, and suppresses many dangers in the way of ridiculing or harshly judging our neighbour. Silence humbles the mind, and gradually weans it from the world; it makes a kind of solitude in the heart like that which you desire: it will supply all that you need under your present difficulties. If you retrenched all useless talk, you would have many available moments even in the midst of society, where you are obliged to stay against your will. You wish for freedom for prayer; whole God, who knows what you need better than you do, surrounds you with restraints and hampering claims. The hindrances which beset you in the order of God's Providence will profit you more than the sweetness of self-chosen prayer. You know very well that retirement is not essential to the love of God. When He gives you time, you must take it and profit by it; but meanwhile abide in faith, satisfied that what He gives you is best. Often lift up your heart to Him, without making any outward sign; talk only when it is necessary; and bear patiently with what crosses you. You have more need of self-denial than of light. If you are faithful in keeping silence when it is not necessary to speak, God will preserve you from evil when it is right for you to talk.

Your portion is to love, to be silent, to suffer, to sacrifice your inclinations, in order to fulfil the will of God, by moulding yourself to that of others. Happy indeed you are thus to bear a cross laid on you by God's own hands, in the order of His Providence. The discipline which we choose for ourselves does not destroy our self-love like that which God assigns us Himself each day. All we have to do is to give ourselves up to God day by day, without looking further. He carries us in His arms as a loving mother carries her child. Let us believe, hope, love, with all the simplicity of children. In every need let us look with love and trust to our Heavenly Father. (pp 43-46)

TO RESERVE A TIME FOR DEVOTION

You greatly need certain free hour in which you could recollect yourself. Try to steal some, and be sure that these little parings of your days will be your best treasures. Above all, save your morning, and defend it as one defends a besieged city; make vigorous sallies upon intruders; clear the trenches, and then shut yourself up within your citadel. Even the afternoon is too long a period to let pass without taking breath.

Recollection is the only cure for your haughtiness, the sharpness of your contemptuous criticism, the sallies of your imagination, your impatience with those who serve you, your love of pleasure, and all your other faults. This is an excellent remedy, but it needs to be frequently renewed.

If you have not much time at your disposal, do not fail to profit by the smallest portions of time which remain to you. We do not need much time in order to love God, to renew ourselves in His presence, to lift up our hearts towards Him, to worship Him in the depths of our hearts, to offer Him what we do and what we suffer. This is the true Kingdom of God within us, which nothing can disturb.

SUPPORT UNDER DIFFICULTY

You need not doubt, Madame, as to what is your support under your difficulties. God is using them to detach you from yourself, and from the comfortable side of life. Recollection and fervour would do much less to lower your pride, and crucify your over-indulged senses.

Let your own choice incline always to reading, prayer, solitude, and silence. Be firm; deny yourself, especially at night, to prepare for yourself a more uninterrupted morning; but when Providence brings you unavoidable hindrances, do not be disturbed. Wheresoever God may lead you, there you will find Himself, in the most harassing business as in the most tranquil prayer. (pp 52-53)