

18. Extract from the 7th Circular Letter

Paris, 29 May 1805

From the prison of The Temple, where Father de Clorivière is since the 5th of May 1804

ON THE SEQUECE OF VIRUTES THAT LEADS TO HOLINESS

(From Circular Letters of Fr. Peter Joseph de Clorivière Adapted in English by by Maureen Halissey DHM, pg 140 – 147)

“For this reason do your best to add goodness to your faith, to your goodness add knowledge, to your knowledge add self-control, to your self-control add patience, to your patience add true devotion, to your devotion add kindness to others, to this kindness add love” (2 Peter 1 : 1-7)

In this letter St Peter, Prince of the Apostles, traced out the sequence of virtues that Christians are recommended to practice, and knowing how alive and sincere your desire for holiness is, I thought my duty to encourage and develop for you that desire. I believed also that I could not do better than put before you what St Peter wished to teach us by these few words, namely that in following this sequence, and taking to heart the different duties that it recommends, we will possess the indescribable happiness, that is the fruit of our Christian calling, and come “ *to share the divine nature*” (2Peter 1 :4)

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This leads us to understand that to practice charity towards the neighbor we must be free from those faults that stem from our own unrestrained self-love. To be perfect, our love must be free of all inordinate desires, and that is something that will be possible only in heaven. Because of our human weakness the other necessary virtues will be absorbed into divine love, while love of neighbor will exist side by side with divine love forever, because love of neighbor flows from divine love and is a participation in the necessary emanation of love that God has for us.

Seventh recommendation: **To this kindness add love**

All virtues, and specially love of our neighbor must be rooted in Divine Love, meaning that it must have an element of that divine love as its motive and in its aim.

When divine love motivates our actions we do not consider a neighbour’s natural qualities, or what is pleasing in him, whether there are ties of friendship or blood, what service he has rendered us, or what we might expect from him. We are not forbidden to love our

neighbor for these reasons, but we must remember that such love as this is natural and merits nothing for heaven.

For love of others to be a love filled with charity it must flow from the belief that our neighbours are created by God, that they bear his image, that they are his children whom he loves. With such belief in our hearts then we love God in our neighbor.

Basically the love of charity that we have is a branch or a shoot of the love we have for God, from whom we receive that virtue as gift. Our love for others must have the same divine source, and it can only be poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Our love for others then, tends directly back towards God from whom it originates. Its purpose has to be that others become more holy and God-like, glorifying him and doing his will. If our love of neighbor has any less pure end in view it is not the love of charity.

The hallmark by which we can surely recognize if our love for others is supernatural is when we love everyone without exception, without distinguishing friends or foes, relations or strangers, and when we desire and do good for all insofar as we can.

The love of charity, which is given to us by the grace of God cannot be ours unless we share it with every person. To exclude one person from our love, even should they be the most wicked and most hateful of persons, will show that we do not possess a love of charity which is necessary for salvation. ***“But now I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be the children of your Father in heaven. For he makes the sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and those who do evil.” (Mt 5:44-45)***

Charity raises us up above all created things and above ourselves; above all that is attractive on earth and greatest in heaven. Whether charity is directed towards God or towards our neighbor, it sees only God whom it loves for himself and above all things.

Charity does not destroy other virtues, or forbid us to practise them. Indeed it recommends all virtues to us for they are necessary in this life. However, it regulates them and refers them all to their end, and love brings them to perfection.

The virtue of Charity, along with Faith and Hope, accompany us on our pilgrimage through life. But Charity, without the other two theological virtues could not subsist because it does not as yet enjoy the Divine Lover or see him face to face. It can only contemplate God with the eye of Faith and it needs the wings of Hope to tend towards Him who is our Alpha and our Omega.

However, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and on fire with His love, Charity rises above Hope and Faith until it becomes lost in the Heart of God, simply to love him blindly as

he is, with that love which God has for himself and that the Three Divine Persons have for one another.

We are to love God because He commands us to love him and because otherwise there would be no salvation for us. This truth is utterly right and is the beginning of wisdom.

We are to love God because from Him we hold all that we are and all that we have in our nature and in grace. We are to love God because our value as human beings is that we are made in his image; also our value as Christians too with all that this implies. It is a duty of gratitude to refer all to God – our body and soul and all of our strengths. Our duty to be grateful is the more urgent because these gifts we have received are innumerable and are for every moment and each one is priceless.

We are to love God because we expect everything from him. He is the inexhaustible source of rich graces and blessings from which we can draw all that we need at any time in the name of Christ his Son, and because God has destined for us after this life, one gift that includes all others, that is Himself. This love belongs to Hope. It obliges us to fix all our desires in God and to work unceasingly to become worthy to possess him.

We are to love God because he loves us. This incentive is purer and stronger than the rest. Nothing touches us more than love. It is also more urgent for when we are filled with God's love we cannot refrain from doing all we can to witness to his love; and our efforts are never sufficient because no matter how much we do it is nothing in comparison with what divine love has done and still continues to do for us.

This incentive is so noble, so pure, that when with God's help one has reached that point it is hardly possible that grace should not complete its work, but perhaps one may never reach this level of supernatural love without rising to that degree of charity. However this incentive is not yet that of pure charity. It is still mingled with some reflection of self and does not see God purely as he is in Himself.

Charity loves God for who he is. It does not exclude other motives, but it does not stop at them. True charity stops only at God's infinite perfection. In God it sees none but God. St. Bernard says that the motive for loving God is God himself.

We should love God even when he has not commanded us to do so, when our salvation would not have depended on this love, when we would have received nothing from him (which is impossible), or expected nothing from him. There would be no hell to fear in not loving him, nor heaven to hope for by loving him.

We should love him because he infinitely deserves love, because it is infinitely right to love him who is the source of all beauty, goodness and loveliness. He who is Himself beauty,

goodness, wisdom, love and before whom all beauty, all excellence, all greatness is eclipsed and disappears.

We should love God above all things and all things in him, because every other being is nothing in comparison with him. It would be an offence to God, an injustice and folly on our part if we loved anything that is created more than God himself, as equal to God, or as God. The law of charity strictly forbids this. When we love God above all things and for himself, when we carefully avoid all that can offend him, when we are firmly determined to lose all and to suffer all rather than to lose his friendship, then we are fulfilling the precept of charity.

But charity knows no limits. "The measure of loving God is to love him without measure" wrote St. Bernard.

What is the measure then of our love of God? It is that we fulfill the great precept of Charity to its widest expanse, loving God with our whole heart and soul, with our entire mind and all our strength, with every act of our will, every thought, every desire and affection, when our words and actions are aglow with the purest charity. When all this is uninterrupted and unalloyed, we are fulfilling what the precept asks of us. But we are not able in this life to fulfill these demands and will only be able to do so in paradise.

The Lord is simply wishing to show us how jealous he is of our love, how we can never sufficiently love him, that there is no moment in time or space, or circumstance when we do not belong to him. He wishes to take first place in our hearts, and we must never allow into our thoughts, feelings, words or actions anything contrary to the preferential love that we owe him.

Now even if such perfection were possible in this life, if our love for God on earth were like the love of the Angels and Saints in heaven, how would it measure up to the greatness of God, to his beauty, to his infinite excellence? What then would it be if we limited this love and did not give it its full expanse with the help of grace? What would it be, if by negligence and want of cooperation we prevented the power of grace from acting in us? What would happen if we grieved the Holy Spirit by a multitude of faults and attachments that are incompatible with true charity?

We can however, to some extent make up for the weakness and insufficiency of our love, because in the economy of grace, love is evenly shared among all the friends of God. In other words the love of the Angels and Saints in heaven for God is truly ours. We can appropriate it and offer it to God as our own. And though this love is not, properly speaking, worthy of God, it has nothing that displeases him and it will cover somewhat the wretchedness and imperfections which are inseparable from the love we offer.

Now let us rise up higher, leaving the exalted seraphim far below us, to reach the Queen of heaven, who, though only a creature, surpasses all others by the fervor and purity of her love, just as she surpasses them by her dignity as Mother of God. As her children we have a special claim on her. The offering of her love will enhance the value of her own. But we will not stop there. Under Mary's patronage we will present ourselves to her Divine Son. We will enter into his Heart, and not be afraid to look upon His love as our own, or offer it as such to the Father. We have an incontestable right to do this. The Father has given Jesus Christ to us. Christ gave himself to us wholly. He is in us and we are in Him. We then make but one person, and all that He possesses is ours. Let us then offer to God the love that burns in the Heart of Jesus. Let us love God through this divine Heart. Then our love will be free from all its miseries and wretchedness, and through Christ we shall love God in a manner worthy of his greatness and infinite goodness.