

20. Extract of the 8th Circular Letter

(*Circular Letters*, translated by Maureen Hallissey, p 159 – 161)

“ Your beauty should consist of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of the reatest value in God’s sight”. (1 Peter 3:4)

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The spiritual person never loses sight of God’s purpose for creation and is able to sense His presence and goodness in all creatures. Everything speaks of God. Everything shows the face of God beckoning all human beings to enter into a deeper relationship with him.

This leads us to reflect on the service that creatures give to human beings and how humans accept them. Every creature is directly or indirectly useful to us humans. I do not have to prove this truth, nor will I enter into details. I will only touch very lightly on the principle material things created by God under which all the others can be enumerated.

Light comes to mind first. It is not an element for it is not a composite part of human creation, while, as with the elements, it is everywhere. It is the most delicate and noble, the most beautiful and useful of material things. Light enters with extraordinary softness. It cannot be soiled. It distinguishes objects and gives them beauty. Without light the universe would be formless chaos; nothing could be done and human beings would die. It is the sun, that most beautiful of all luminaries, which gives light its activity.

Then come the four elements:

Air rises above the others because it is the lightest. It fills the vault of the sky and numberless stars move freely through it and so do light and sound. Vegetation and growth would not survive without air. Human beings and animals need to constantly breathe the air to stay alive. The winds have their source in it.

Water is generally useful and necessary for life. It irrigates the soil and without it the grass would no longer be green and the beasts would die of hunger and thirst.

Fire is the strongest of the elements. We need it for cooking, for softening metals and for heating during the cold weather.

The earth produces our food and gives us many precious metals for our use. Indeed it is impossible to enumerate all the benefits that the earth provides for us human beings.

The question is how do we receive all these benefits? And how do we use them? Without dwelling on the ingratitude of the many persons who only use God’s gifts to insult their

Maker, we ask about the others whom God blesses with abundant benefits but who never reflect on his goodness. They imagine that any gift they receive is due to them, and they complain when it is not to their taste. These people are interested in the gift but never think of the Creator.

What we have already said regarding how spiritual persons look on created things tells us enough about how they recognize the many ways they are served by God's gifts. We also see how they use those gifts.

Spiritual persons recognize God's gifts as so many expressions of His goodness for the relief of their sufferings, to provide for their needs and fulfill their desires. Through all these gifts they see the action of God himself, *"God gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil."* (Mt 5: 45)

It is God who gives light through the rays of the sun, air for all to breathe, water to refresh, and who gives food the power to sustain human beings.

Spiritual persons see themselves as beloved children in the arms of a provident God who passionately cares about all their needs and concerns. And just as God multiplies his care for them to the point of infinity so they would wish to multiply to infinity their acts of gratitude towards him in return.

Their gratitude is further increased by the fact that they recognize these natural gifts as only a shadow of the infinitely greater and more numerous spiritual gifts given to them every day. When they reflect on visible light they are drawn into a deeper understanding of the invisible light of Christ who illumines their minds and hearts, Christ is their sun.

Air represents the immensity of God wrapping his arms around them.

Water recalls baptism and also *the fountain of water* promised by Christ, that becomes a spring, which will be: *"Life-giving water, leading to eternal life"*. (John 4: 14)

Fire becomes a symbol of God's love and of his justice.

Earth becomes a reminder of divine Providence on whose fatherly care all spiritual persons love to rely.

In food they see divine and delicious nourishment, which the heavenly Word gives to the faithful in the desert of this mortal life.

From such reflections it becomes clear that spiritual persons are expected to judge the value of created things and their effects very differently from others. The latter, deluded by self-love, judge mostly by the senses and by worldly standards. Anything that is repulsive to nature or obstructs selfish desires, anything that is contrary to honour, glory and riches

is unbearable for them. They regard pain, poverty, plagues, pestilences and humiliations as great evils to be avoided.

Spiritual persons judge these catastrophes as happenings that are related to the end for which all human beings are created, and as related to the will of God and the choice that God-made-man, Jesus Christ, chose for himself. With such an attitude they will see winter cold and frost, burning summer heat, storms, earthquakes, **pestilence** and famine or floods, as instruments that God in his merciful justice uses to purify his people and give them a crown of glory in heaven. Poverty, humiliation, the troubles and labours of life, failure in business, lack of talent, temptations and trials, dryness in the service of God will all lose their dire threat when they are seen as part of the will of God. Spiritual persons accept them with resignation and love.

The means that the Saviour of the world chose for our redemption and to give glory to his Father, such as humiliations, insulting abuse, the sacrifice of self for the sake of truth and finally the cross, when they come to us, are thus ennobled and made divine. The Lord chooses his closest and dearest friends to have a share in his sufferings, while they in turn, look upon themselves as being unworthy of so great a favour.