

BLACKFRIARS

SUPPLEMENT

THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

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MAJESTAS DIVINA

BY

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Translator's Note.

The name of Fr. Erich Przywara will be chiefly familiar to English readers through his "Augustine Synthesis" and "Newman Synthesis." In "Majestas Divina" he has attempted what may be described as an interpretation of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. Many people find the Spiritual Exercises a baffling work. Even those who are familiar with the practice of making retreats may fall into a literalism in their study of the text which prevents their seeing the movement of thought and feeling which makes the book of the Exercises the powerful instrument that it can be. It seems to be the great merit of Fr. Przywara's work that it brings out the pattern woven by the words of St. Ignatius, and by linking up the language of the Exercises with St. Ignatius's other writings—his Constitutions and Letters in particular—clarifies that often misunderstood thing, "Ignatian Spirituality."

In this first section, the author is concerned to underline the general dispositions of mind and heart that are required of one who would learn aright the lessons that St Ignatius is seeking to teach. The section is entitled "Solitude" because a certain solitude of spirit, expressed in the practice of silence and withdrawal characteristic of a retreat, is fundamental if the exercitant is to draw near to God.

The translator has adopted the device of printing his version in short phrases simply in order to make it possible for the English reader to cope with the massive German sentences of the

original. Fr Przywara has a habit of building up great syntactical structures which have to be taken apart in an English rendering. But, in spite of the often poetical flavouring of the language, the work is a prose work, and any poetical rhythms that may be detected in the English are entirely accidental.

SOLITUDE

1.

Alone . . .

drooping now all the blossoms of your spring,
all your summer and golden autumn
merged in a strangely cold November lifelessness
the last drops of your life
falling
in a melancholy drizzle.

Your hands go out
to clasp hands that aforesaid warmed yours. . . .
nothing
but chill solitude

And this last solitude
is not like any of those former solitudes that went before it
and are now grown into one
and each of these solitudes of your life,
was it not the life of your life?

You were sheltered in your mother's lap
over your head a father's protecting hand;
but it was only a dream
then a dream-vision of what was to be
now only a dream
from which one day on a sudden you awoke
clear daylight beating upon astonished eyes
and you knew what way was before you
where father and mother must remain behind;
you must go on alone
left to yourself
into unknown lands afar.

You found comrades
trusty companions to go with you
often so close to you that they seemed to be another self
but when solitude terrified you
and you thought they were so near

so much a part of you
 that in their love your solitude must disappear
 like clouds in the waxing sunshine;
 was it not just then that the doors closed more tightly than ever
 until you learned that every man has his own solitude
 not to be broken into by created hands?

Who shares your solitude
 Who is of His very Essence Solitude
 so much so that It is a Solitude of complete Self-Sufficiency
 in the Infinite Fullness of His own life
 that His Self-Sharing
 is not the seeking of one in need
 but the giving of One who has no needs,
 that Life with Him is no straitening solitude
 but Infinity inexhaustible.

Every created thing wears a double aspect - - -
 however bountiful and firm-set the earth abides of itself
 however rich and blooming of itself the plant
 however passionate and throbbing life pulses of itself
 however unfettered by Space and Time moves the Spirit
 another strange invisible Face
 peers through this familiar visible world,
 through this tangible an Intangible,
 a Face that becomes more visible
 the more remote that other,
 a Face that flashes nearer to you
 the greater your aloofness from that other;
 if you stand off from It as in the presence of the Holy
 It approaches
 "His invisibility . . . is manifested in that which is visible."

Therefore occur
 these solitudes of your life,
 therefore are they the true life of your life
 since in them the true inner Face of all that is
 reveals Itself;
 for during them the veil falls
 the veil that else for your eyes of flesh and blood shrouds ultimate
 [Reality;

in their unstirring peace
 the one only GOD speaks to your soul
 that in Him your solitude may be resolved
 into the fullness of Life Invisible with Him,
 that now you may "find" all in Him
 "Him in all things and them all in Him."

"The more our soul finds herself alone and apart
 the readier does she make herself to draw near to her Creator
 [and Lord,
 and to attain Him;
 and the closer she comes to Him
 the more does she dispose herself to receive graces and gifts
 from his Divine and Supreme Goodness."

2.

But
 just as your life with father and mother
 your life with your fellow-travellers
 was not something temporary
 an hour with them and then no more
 a life with only a part of yourself
 so that actually only what you *did* affected them
 not what you *were*
 a life on the visible plane in a visible way
 a life of the senses only not of the soul,
 no
 just as it is far truer to say that your happiness
 lay in the fact that they were the life of your life
 always with you and for you and in you,
 even as you yourself are
 always with you and for you and in you
 so that all your thinking
 was a thinking-with-them
 your feeling and dreaming a feeling and dreaming-with-them
 your operations co-operation
 your fear a fellow-fear,
 and was not your greatest bliss
 your *invisible* life with them?
 ah, is it not true that your communion with them
 did not begin
 until their life became the breath of yours,
 until in a silence from the world and from men
 their voices spoke to you with greater clearness
 and you answered
 in the mute ecstasy of holy love?

Was not the way of your love of them
 that it began by speculation *about* them
 an analytical reflection
 in order to arrive at the certainty of a knowledge
 intimate to your heart?

and did not all knowledge slowly change
into a converse and commerce of the heart
a silent unbroken communion?
did not all interchange of words
even words unspoken
merge into wordless, soundless, intimate seeing and listening
feeling, touching, savouring
until two should become one thing in love
beyond all fear of sundering
by Space or Time
or Death?

even so
does the very God wish to enter with you
into the ineffable solitude of Life Everlasting,
not any more in analytical speculation *about* Him
but in "knowledge intimate to the heart"
such that the eye of your soul pierce through the husk
to the bliss within,
that even this knowledge pass
to an inwardly reverent converse and commerce
"even as friend talks to friend
or servant to master
discussing all his affairs with him
and asking counsel";
so that in the end even this speech and intercourse pass in turn
into an unbroken indescribable seeing
of His invisible glory
a hearing of His voice "in gentle whispering"
"the savouring and tasting of the fragrance
of the tenderness and sweetness of the Divinity";
so that as your external life trembles and stirs
breathes and pulses
through all your senses,
they all bathed in Him,
the whole undiminished vitality of your life
may thrust inwards
to where you lead your life with the living God
"lover of life"
Life Eternal;
so that the world in which you really live
is no longer this visible perishable world
but the invisible imperishable;
so that all the external life of this visible world
is but an invitation ever-renewed

to the invisible,
all human speech
human action
human love
an incessant incitement and incentive
to that inner speech, activity, love
with your God
in whom you live and move and have your being;
so that all your created life among things created
is for you a "ceaseless drawing nigh"
an intimate unification
in growing love
with your Creator and Lord"
since "you realise how the whole of Eternal God
is in all creatures
giving them being and sustenance
through His Infinity and Presence.'

Thus is your life with Him
a life of inexhaustible vitality
for "not excess of knowledge *about* objects
satisfies and satiates the soul
but to perceive and savour them intimately."

3.

When the door of a soul sought to open to you
when the voice of her love called softly to you
who was it that led you
into her inmost secret room,
how did you come to approach nearer and nearer
step by step
slowly at first, slowly
until one day the door closed behind you
softly, softly
and there was made one single solitude
of blissful love?

Was it not because your soul, too, had thrown itself open
without reserve
to the least stirring of every breath
of hers,
because your eyes had become wholly
her eyes
to see only what she saw
as she saw it,

your ear hers
your feelings her feelings
your touch her touch
your desire
utterly and wholly one
with her desire
your fear her fear
your very thinking
a thinking of her thoughts
your will
identified with hers . . .
so that now you felt and heard
touched, saw
feared, thought, willed
exactly as did she?
Was it not because you surrendered yourself
to her
utterly
lost yourself
in her
only to find yourself
greater in stature
richer in sheer bliss
in her love . . .
so that the measure of her power
to fill you with ecstatic joy
was the degree of your surrender
in utter confidence,
that she herself
drew you into herself
herself becoming your guide
to that secret room?

And behold
that which amongst men
is finite and ephemeral
since of necessity all love must encounter
the limits of the created . . .
GOD
the Infinite
offers to you an approach to Himself
that is without limit,
Himself the guide
to Himself.

For in the solitudes of your life
 a blissful solitude with Him opens out
 full of grace.
 For He Himself is calling you
 opening the door for you.
 Your self-realisation is "to enter
 with soul wide-open
 in a surrender of boundless self-dedication
 to your Creator and Lord,
 offering Him all your desire and longing
 and your whole freedom
 that His Divine Majesty may dispose of you
 of your person and all you have
 according to His most holy Will."

For this is "the great universal law:
 the more entirely a man surrenders to God
 the more complete his giving
 his joy in giving
 to His Divine Majesty
 the more bounteous shall he find Him in return
 the more apt will he daily become
 to receive in full measure
 the graces and gifts of the Spirit."

"Sacrifice of himself and all that he has
 to God
 as though he were a snowflake falling from heaven."

[*To be Continued.*]

CARMELITE TRIPTYCH

BY

LANCELOT C. SHEPPARD

Some twenty years ago Pius XI pointed out how important is the rôle of the contemplative in the Church. He said that they who assiduously fulfil the duty of prayer and penance contribute much more to the increase of the Church and the welfare of mankind than those who labour in tilling the Master's field; for unless the former drew down from heaven a shower of divine graces to water the field that is being tilled, the evangelical labourers would reap indeed from their toil a more scanty crop."¹ It is true that his words were addressed to cloistered religious,

(1) Apostolic Constitution *Umbratilem*, Acta Ap. Sedis, xvi, 383.