

tion and choice. But there are occasions when we experience sudden inspirations to avoid sin or to practise virtue which are not the result of previous deliberation. It is in this way that the Holy Spirit takes the initiative, although even by subsequent reflection the sudden inspirations cannot be known with certainty to be his 'secret warnings and invitations'. If it is not possible to begin a good life without his help, it is much less possible to reach any high degree of sanctity without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Prayer in its higher forms is an activity of the mind under his illuminating movement. Under his direction we are in the first instance passive, instruments; but we are responsible human instruments, capable of responding freely to his guidance in the path which faith marks out.

As God sees the Christian soul, it is transformed both in itself and in its powers of acting. We do not know the spiritual and the supernatural directly, and only from the truths which God has revealed are we aware of this change. Without a special revelation we cannot know with absolute certainty that we ourselves are in a state of grace⁷. A good conscience, and the desire and intention to love God and to avoid sin, give us a practical assurance sufficient for peace of soul that it is so. The same is true of the virtues. The domain of the natural and supernatural virtues is the same. We are in part aware that our actions are supernaturally virtuous because of the higher supernatural motives which inspire them.



FROM ST THOMAS'S COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN

Jesus saith to her: Do not touch me: for I am not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brethren and say to them: I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.

(John 20, 17.)



ESUS saith to her: Do not touch me.' The Evangelist is here describing how our Lord gives Mary two commands, the first a prohibition, the second a positive order, when he says 'But go to my brethren'.

Now as to the prohibition, two points should be noted: (1) our Lord gives the command; and (2) he explains the reason.

Although we do not actually read in this Gospel narrative that she wanted to touch him, our Lord certainly forbids Mary by saying 'Touch me not'. From what is written we are to infer, according

⁷ St Thomas, *Summa* I-II, 112, 5.

to Gregory, that Mary had cast herself upon the feet of Christ, and in her intense eagerness would have embraced even the very foot-prints of him whom she had recognised. The reason why our Lord prevented her follows: 'For I have not yet ascended to my Father'.

So it would seem that after the Resurrection our Lord did not wish to be touched by men before his Ascension.

But we read differently in the Gospel of St Luke (24, 39): 'Handle and see for a spirit hath not flesh and bones'. It has been suggested that our Lord was willing to be touched by his disciples but not by the holy women. This, however, is untenable because the last chapter of St Matthew's Gospel describes Magdalene and the other women drawing near to our Lord and clinging to his feet.

From a literal reading of the texts we may gather that St Mary Magdalene saw the Angels twice on this journey. St Matthew (28, 5) and St Mark (16, 5) describe the first encounter, when Magdalene was with the other women and saw an angel sitting upon the stone outside the tomb. St John (20, 12) tells of the second time when Magdalene returned by herself and saw two angels inside the sepulchre. So too passing along the same way she met our Lord twice. Once in the garden she thought he was the gardener. She met him a second time, as she ran with the other women to confirm the faith of the disciples in the Resurrection by telling them all she had seen; and then she and the other holy women drew near and clung to his feet. We find this narrated in St Matthew and St Mark.

But there is also a twofold mystical reason, why our Lord would not have Mary Magdalene touch him. For this woman was a symbol of the Church of the Gentiles, which was to touch Christ by faith only after he had ascended to his Father: 'A congregation of people shall surround thee: for their sakes return thou on high' (Ps. 7, 8). The second reason is because, according to St Augustine, (*I De Trinitate*, 9), touch forms as it were the highest point of knowledge. For when we see a thing we know it in so far as we see it, but by touching it we have complete and perfect knowledge of it. Now St Mary Magdalene already had a certain degree of faith in our Lord. She believed that he was a holy man and even called him Master, but she had not yet come to realise that he was equal to the Father and one with God. And so our Lord said, 'Do not touch me', which means: you must not suppose that what you believe about me is the whole truth, 'For I have not yet ascended to my Father'; because in your inmost heart you do not believe that I am one with him. . . . She learnt to believe this afterwards.

Then our Lord imposes a positive order, saying: 'But go to my brethren', which means the Apostles who are his brethren, since he resembles them in his human nature: 'Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren' (Hebrews, 2, 17); and also by adoption through grace whereby the Apostles are the adopted sons of that same Father whose Son Christ is by nature. We should note at this point that a threefold privilege was conferred upon Magdalene: (1) Prophecy, in that she deserved to see angels, for a prophet is an intermediary between angels and mortals; (2) The dignity of the angels, in that she saw Christ upon whom the angels desire to look; (3) The office of an Apostle; yes indeed she was made the Apostle of the Apostles in that she was commissioned to report the Resurrection of our Lord to the disciples. So that just as in the first place a woman pronounced the words of death to man, a woman also should be the first to pronounce the words of life. 'And say to them: I ascend to my Father and your Father', which can be compared with chapter 14, 5: 'I go to him who sent me'. 'He that descended is the same also that ascended above all the heavens' (Ephes. 4, 10).

A SILLY SOUL

This extract comes from a translation of the *Documento Spirituale* which William Flete recorded from St Catherine's life at their meeting, 1376-7. It occurs in the Bodleian MS. 131, fol. 131, after Walter Hilton's translation of William Flete's: *De remediis contra tentationes*. It is an indication of St Catherine's connection with English writers through Flete. The MS. is written by one John Morton and bound into the back is a formal recommendation of John Morton and his wife Juliana to the spiritual help of the Austin friars by Willelmus, provincial of the Order in England, dated York, 1438.—C.K.

A SILLY soul, asked of God, our steadfast Lord, cleanness of soul, and God appeared to her and said, 'If thou wilt have that cleanness that thou asketh, thee behoves be oned to me perfectly that am sovereign cleanness. And that shalt thou be if thou wilt keep three things that I shall say unto thee: The first is if thou put thee and all thine entent of all thy works in me, make me the end, and if thou travail thee aye to have me before the eye of thy soul. The second is if thou forsake utterly thine own will and but take heed of my will that will thy holiness and thy good living, and deem aye that I do nothing nor suffer nothing to be done to thee but for thy good, and if thou take heed of this manner, thou shalt not be heavy, thou shalt not be wrath, but rather [be] holden to him that does thee wrong. The third is if thou deem any gates my servants' works, deem not after thine own doom but after my doom.