

Life of the Spirit

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A DIURNAL FOR NOVEMBER

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DEATH! What is death but home? 'At the hour of death call me.' That is the prayer that we have put on our lips by the Church. One of those old prayers, prayers that endure, solid prayers, no nonsense about it, one of those prayers that carries with it a fortifying power. People are sometimes frightened of talking of death; we shrink from death naturally, rightly, it is the breaking up of all we know, it is the putting away of familiar things, it is venturing into a strange country; about it there must be a certain strangeness and fear and sense of disaster—and yet, why? 'At the hour of death call me.' That is all death ever is—just a voice calling.

2. Make sure of this that we are looking at him steadily, steadfastly seeing him present in the world, in our lives, in our fellows, consciously living with him. Remember we cannot touch pitch without being defiled, so we cannot live with holiness and not be holy.

3. Just before the business of life, almost at dawn, we talk to him. Think of that wonderful saying of St John's 'and when morning dawn was come Jesus stood upon the shore'.

4. We picture him in the various moments of his life, in various circumstances; we note how he bears himself, what he says and does. With this we contrast our own failure, meanness, little-mindedness; but we then say to ourselves: 'Well in spite of all this, I am not going to lose heart. Of course I can never catch up to him as he swings down the road; but then, he never asked me to catch up, he only asked me to follow.' Follow then I can. For me he is the perfect figure of a man—much more human than the saints, than the Baptist, because he is divine. He is a pillar of fire

¹ Towards the end of Fr Bede Jarrett's life a religious collected together an anthology of his sayings given to her community during retreats. These she arranged one for every day of the year and her selection for November is here presented.—EDITOR.

by night to me and I follow a speck in the distance, stumbling, wearied, dusty, frequently falling yet for all that a follower. Christ is for me the ideal, which is in him real, and in me, though never to be realised, provoking me to continued action.

5. Our prayer must be built with our own hands . . . the *one* thing I can offer for myself, from myself.

6. Let me consider what the morning Mass must have meant to the Mother of God. When her Child had been taken from the Cross and laid in the tomb she was to see him on earth again after he had risen from the dead; but after the Ascension she was to see him no more till that day when she passed to the Day. But at the Mass, when she watched the beloved disciple hold up what seemed bread and when she heard the whispered words of power, she knew him once again in the breaking of the bread. Dare we trespass nearer on that sacred intimacy? She saw, as on Calvary, her Son's death. For St Peter, St John and the rest, how fervent must have been their reparation at Mass for that sad night when they left him or denied him, or stood far off from him. What comfort, consolation, encouragement in the missionary ventures of faith indeed! Let me think of the strength that came to them every morning that they held in their hands the bread and knew that it had indeed become that Body they had seen and handled—for the men and women and troops of little children imprisoned in the Catacombs who found, in the Mass said in the wind-swept passages amid the tombs of the martyred Christians, the grace to meet with patience the trouble that each day brought, who saw in the sacrifice the open door beyond their narrow lives. However dreary or intolerable in itself the hour was made glad and cheerful by the savour of this saving rite. Our fathers in the days of persecution risked all for the chance Mass and the infrequent visits of a priest who might repeat for them the ceremonies of the Upper Room in Jerusalem, and make the loss of lands and life easy compared with the gaining of that 'seldom presence'. If I wish to value aright my privilege of the Mass I must follow intelligently the whole ceremony from the *Confiteor* to the last Gospel.

7. To hold God before us, keep ourselves face to face with God, *that is* religious life.

8. The soul is certain of its release [from purgatory], but it cannot in any way that we know of hasten the time of it; it is left in that regard entirely in our hands, at our mercy. It is, as St Thomas reminds us, the supreme expression of friendship that the friend should bear the sufferings of his friend; if we could take upon our shoulders the pains of all our friends, surely they would always be at peace. Here, then, that course is open to us and we can truly

save them from these penalties. They are waiting—not impatiently, for they cannot cry out against the will of God; but it is in my power to help them. Let me see to it that this is done, and the law of love obeyed.

9. Believe in God's knowledge, wisdom, love, humanity, benignity, in his gentleness—then you have something to sooth all dismay and distress. 'Let not your heart be troubled.' Why should our hearts be troubled? Trust in God. What does it matter who is against me, I have God. He has always been good to me. So not exactly in confidence do we look to the future, we do not look out at it—we leave it in God's hands. He has never yet failed us and he will never let go—we may, he will not.

10. There will be one who will be to us in death a comfort, a refuge, a hope. The very figure of the Judge will be itself the sole sight that will give us any gleam of brightness in so horrid a scene. The five great wounds—will not their light illuminate even the dark corners of a stricken soul and give it hope in the weary waste of its bitter isolation. Through him will all our good actions take on an infinite value. The comfort that he himself has given in his own wonderful description of that day is found in the gracious text: 'Inasmuch as you did it to the least of my brethren you did it to me'. Whatever we have done that is good will have its reward from him. The great doctrine of the unity of all Christians into a sacred body of which Christ is the head will give even in the horrors of that moment a supreme relief. All the devotion that I have shown to the saints will there have been gathered up and regarded as devotion to him; for a Catholic reverence for the saints is only exhibited because they are his friends so that in reality (as we hold) those who have shown them reverence have really been showing reverence to Christ. The kindnesses of life, the little we have done for others, will be remembered for our reward. Thus through the terrors and horrors of the awful judgment there will always be the light lit by friendship; the unswerving love that we have shown to him who is ever faithful will not be forgotten. There can be no loneliness so long as he is there.

11. It doesn't matter what your means of transit are provided you scale the hills at last, pushing up into the sky.

12. In our hearts we must find peace—*truth*. Remember only to gaze at God. In the confessional is set a picture not of ourselves but of God on the cross, it implies [that] this is not my act of sorrow but God's act of mercy. The highest act of sorrow is that where self is forgotten, only God, absolutely, himself. If we would find life we must lose it, if we would find forgiveness of our sins we must forget about them and think only of God.

13. Of us is asked that venture of faith called meekness. It gives peace and is anything more needed? So, treading on the waters—at peace—relying not on self, that is forgotten, relying absolutely on God.

14. The human soul is so completely a thing that you cannot root out the tares without doing some mischief to the good. The tendencies to evil that are in us are mingled with the tendencies to good. We are what we are and we must put our hands in the divine hands and take our life as God has given it to us. Prayer means union with God, with the divine will. Never say 'Take temptation away from me', rather say, 'Give me strength always to hold out'. That I think is one of the lessons we most need in prayer. Strengthened by his power, 'Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may dwell in me'.

15. We require mercy [while] living and still more do we require it at death. To our Mother we turn, knowing our need, and beg her to turn her eyes of mercy towards us as she stands at the throne of God.

16. 'Nothing else but thee, Lord', said St Thomas. And we must set our hearts on nothing else than himself. Poverty, chastity, obedience, these are means to do it more easily, literally, whole-heartedly.

17. I must be content simply to take the life of this day. Let the dead past bury its dead and let tomorrow take care for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own evil. Let me resolutely fight the battle that presents itself to me and leave alone the bogey that my own imagination by itself has created. Even were I assured of length of days let me be content to take each as it comes. I shall fail tomorrow? Perhaps! Anyhow, let me make certain that I do not fail today. Today God is with me. Will he not, who inhabiteth eternity, be able to be with me tomorrow also? Steadfastness in love is the most attractive virtue in God or man.

18. By the divine liturgy, the eyes of the soul are steadily lifted to God. By the austere and silent fashion of his life the distractions of the world are held off him. By the long dwelling therefore upon the divine beauty while the soul is at peace, the fire of love breaks out in the heart of the monk.

19. To meet all that life may yet hold of loneliness, trial and failure in the spirit of Christ-like acceptance of God's will, of the Christ-like joy and desire, we must look at life steadily, unshrinkingly, recognising that we too may be called by God to follow his footsteps along the dolorous way of sorrow. 'Go and prepare', he said to Peter, 'that we may eat'. And this preparation he asks equally of each individual soul. Each must make the necessary effort of the preparation.

20. Your own saint, St Andrew, saw his beauty and caught the eye of our Lord. 'Tell me where thou dwellest', the boy asked. It was not enough to visit him; 'Where do you live?' he wanted to know. And our Lord answered, 'Come and see'. He would not tell—'Come yourself and look'. And Andrew looked—it took him all his life to look. The next time he left all, still looking, and found he had no abiding place—no city, no home, and he chased him for three years. And Andrew still followed and when our Lord left the world to go back to his Father, Andrew found him in the souls around—he looked for the home of Christ there.

21. Nowadays there is the terrible desire to finish everything. What does it matter if it is finished or not so long as it is as God wills it to be—leave it to him. As Mother Julian says, 'There's no doer but he'. God will make good what we leave undone. The children [in your school] are *his* children. His care of them is greater than yours can ever be. Trust him to make good.

22. We, saying the rosary, feel the closeness of God's love—know that he came to save me, died for me, and that under the protection of his Mother we come to him to learn his beauty and majesty and strength and endurance and purity. All this will enlighten the understanding of the soul and help you to come, through your devotion to her, to him. He is your Ideal, the one you love and want to imitate—your God, closer to you at every time of your life at every minute of the day, until the end when we shall see things greater than we can imagine—see and possess *him* for ever.

23. When we think of God's knowledge, his blazing justice, though true, we must remember his almost incredible mercy. Now there your past lies. St Catherine of Siena speaks of 'the pacific sea of peace', clear-coloured and softened, translucent, really *mercy*. 'Let the dead bury their dead; Come thou and follow me.' Leave all the past alone, or, if you will go back, remember it is enshrined in him. In amber some poor thing died. It has tossed on the sea for ages and is enshrined in the clear amber—so we in God.

24. Children are impressed not by what we say but by what we are. A child may be put off higher ideals by the failure of a teacher to aim high. Education is not to teach a child to gain a livelihood but to teach it how to live. Education is not training the memory but the soul—forming of character.

25. Prayer must be familiar talk, chatter, the unfolding of our heart, not artificial. No one on earth would ever stand being spoken to as we speak to God. 'O Thou', publicly, yes, but not privately. Talk—don't merely present grand phrases.

26. Now just because life is so dreary and humdrum, we must

keep hold of our ideal, and despite appearances convince ourselves that it is a sacred thing. We must see in it nothing common nor mundane, but continually be searching for the nobler side of it, not to live a life that is out of the ordinary, but in the ordinary minute details of life to see something always worthy of human effort. If we care really to do so we can see wonderful things in the dullest of our neighbours, for birth is always a miracle and death a tragedy.

27. Surely it will be of the utmost importance to me to realise this nearness of God, and the courage that its perception will give. In all my trials none are so hard for me to bear as discouragement and depression. How then can I now shirk my duty and the disagreeable necessities imposed on me once I have made use of the divine friend, whose hand is always locked in mine?

28. The very monotony of his chant, its rising and falling cadence becomes even a physical help to steady his attention and keep it fixed, and all his life is lived for these brief moments. They justify monasticism to the monk. They make him realise the better part that he has chosen; they make worth while all his sacrifice and his austerity; and the deepening loneliness of life (whatever may be the work that he is engaged on) suddenly loses all its menace and becomes the necessary condition of his new-found soul.

29. Through the ways of sorrow and through discipline only shall men reach God one by one. So they found it—they that had known and loved God, his own great lovers, the saints in every time. So St Andrew, today's patron, found his way to God; he had followed him through corn-fields, he had followed him and heard about the sparrows and the lilies that grow in the fields, he had seen the sheep on the hillside and somehow they seemed to disclose knowledge, but that was learning discipline at the feet of Christ. When God exalted himself upon the Cross, lonely, suffering, then at last he knew that he had found the way to Christ. Andrew found him on the cross; so his Mother found him too; he suffered and she suffered in his suffering. Always on the cross; there is no other way to the discipline through which knowledge reaches us.

30. In the acts of St Andrew's martyrdom we read how he expressed his love by way of death. He comes to the place of death and when he saw the cross, 'Where dwellest thou?' the old question of the boy, was still in his heart. He had to climb to the cross to find where Christ dwelt—here was his answer and his joy overflows. 'O precious cross, which the members of my Lord have thus made so goodly, how long have I loved thee, how constantly have I sought thee! And now that thou art come to me, now is my soul drawn to thee. Welcome me from among men and join me again to my

Master, that as by thee he redeemed me, so by thee also he may take me unto himself.' Andrew had missed the way on that dark, dreadful day, Friday and its eve—and now lonely, desolate, and in agony, 'Where dwellest thou?'—and the answer 'Come and see'. He was to go through his life looking, and the realisation was only to be found at the end—on the cross. Hide and seek, always trying to find him under disguises. Where does he not dwell; where shall we not find him? 'If I take my wings early in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall the hand lead me.' 'Where dwellest thou?' Where? In everybody, in everything. To find him in the love of the brotherhood is love of himself. Patient kindness to see Christ in all, in work, in pain, in distress, in joy. The one thing that can alter life, if we love and look, knowing he is there. 'Where dwellest thou?' Look and find him in that last place of all, the hour of our death. 'Though I go down into the valley of the shadow I shall not fear, for thou art there.' It robs death of its horror, of all but *him*. To find him, that is most excellent, the purpose of the cloister, why we come. We must go as pilgrims, searching. If we never find him at least we can look for him—and we have found *life*.



FROM ST AUGUSTINE

'Fides enim debet praecedere intellectum, ut sit intellectus fidei praemium.'

Sermo CXXXIX—1.

'Si non potes intelligere, crede ut intelligas. Praecedit fides, sequitur intellectus.'

Sermo CXVIII—1.

To understand, a man must first believe:
How can a mortal's finite mind receive
Infinity? How shall the spark contain
Love's conflagration, or the ephemeron gain
One pulse of Th'Eternal?

By Faith alone

The darkened stage is lit, the scenery shown:
Then in that light, Reason will search, and find
The forms of Heavenly Truth for Earth designed.

JOHN SEARLE.