

Contrition

The Golden Key of Paradise. The Key to Heaven.

By an Italian Priest.

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INTRODUCTION.

At first sight of this little book, that bears the high-sounding title of “The Golden Key of Paradise,” perhaps, dear reader, you will be somewhat curious to know whether its contents are as good as its title. Perhaps you are inclined to shrug your shoulders and feel as you do when you see advertised marvellous and infallible cures for all the ills that flesh is heir to.

No — be not deceived; this is a genuine key, and one you can easily manipulate. It is Perfect Contrition, which for the forty centuries (or more, according to many Biblical scholars) before the coming of Christ was the only means of salvation for all those who had committed sin, and which even now is destined to save myriads of souls. Look at its marvellous power. It can open Heaven every day, and every moment of each day. Especially is it efficacious if at the moment of death you cannot have at your side the priest, the dispenser of the divine mercies, an absence unfortunately only too common nowadays, on account of the number of sudden deaths. In this case, Perfect Contrition will be the last key which, with the grace of God, will open Heaven to you. But it is necessary to learn during life how to use this key at the moment of death. How many souls that otherwise would have been lost for all eternity have, by means of an Act of True Contrition, opened Paradise for themselves The learned and holy Cardinal Johann Baptist Franzelin said “If I could wander through the country preaching the Word of God, my favourite theme would be Perfect Contrition.” Golden words, dear reader, with which I fully agree; adding, however, that I would wish to do the same from the pulpits in the cities, where the occasions of sin are greater and the dangers to one's soul are innumerable.

PREFACE TO THE ITALIAN TRANSLATION.

THE Author, by a happy inspiration called this little book “The Golden Key of Paradise.” And, in fact, our true home, yours and mine, and of everybody else, is Heaven. This world in which we now live is not our true home. So true is this that, sooner or later, Death will drive us hence and send us to that Home Eternal. Now, in order to enter into the home of true and everlasting happiness, Heaven, we need a key with which to open the door. And in this little book you will find that key — a key of purest gold, fashioned by a zealous priest from the teachings of the Gospel and of the Catholic Church. This key is called Perfect Contrition.

Now, if Perfect Contrition is the Key to Heaven, it naturally follows that everybody should possess one, and know how to use it. And so, whoever you may be, or whatever may be your condition and state in life, this book is written specially for you.

Are you a priest? This pamphlet will call to your mind beautiful practical truths, the importance of which you may never have considered, and as you turn over these pages you will feel constrained to impart to your flock the wonderful knowledge that is yours.

Are you in a religious community? What peace can you not procure for yourself by frequently using this key.

Are you the father or mother of a family? Then accept this precious key to open the Gates of Heaven for yourself; and leave it as an heirloom to your children; they will thank you for it for all eternity.

Are you a teacher? Teach your charges the frequent use of this mystical key. Some day they will appreciate it.

Whatever you are, learn to use this golden key, and, should any of the thousand disasters so frequent nowadays overtake you, you have at hand the means of saving your soul.

Are you a good Catholic? Use this key frequently, for it led the saints to the apex of sanctity.

Are you a sinner? This key is made specially for you, for it shows you how to reopen the gates that you have closed by sin. I will go even further. Are you a heretic, an infidel in good faith, or one who, knowing his error, is now at death's door, and has no time to embrace the True Faith or reconcile himself with God? Fortunate are you if this golden key should have come into your hands. It can save you from Hell and open Heaven for you. Fly, fly then, little book, like a butterfly with golden wings, enter into the houses of the rich and of the poor; go into the schools and workshops; fly over mountains and plains, over land and sea; find your way into the steamers and trains; penetrate the mines; ascend to the aeroplane in the clouds; where ever sin and death may be, there bring the light and consolation that are contained in your modest pages.

Key to Heaven.

What is Perfect Contrition?

FIRST of all, what is contrition? Later on we will see about that word "perfect." Contrition is a grief of the soul, a detestation of sin committed. It must be accompanied by a firm resolution of amending one's life and of sinning no more.

I. PERFECT CONTRITION.

The Soul's Sorrow.

Now, for real contrition, three conditions are necessary — it must be internal, universal, and supernatural.

(a) It must be internal or inward. It must come from the depths of the heart, and does not consist of acts pronounced by the lips without reflection or thought. It is not necessary to manifest our sorrow by sighs and tears. These may be signs of contrition, but they are not essential or necessary parts of it. Contrition rests in the soul and in the firm resolution of leaving our sin and returning to God.

(b) Our contrition must be universal — that is, it must be extended to all the sins, at least to all the mortal sins, that we have committed.

(c) Lastly, it must be supernatural, which means that it must be founded on some motive of faith — for example, on Hell, on Purgatory, on Heaven, on God, or on some similar motive. Our contrition

would be natural, and thereby useless, if it were founded on some purely natural motive of interest or reason — as, for example, if we were sorry because our sins brought us some illness or dishonour or pecuniary loss. But if our sorrow is founded on some truth of our Faith — for example, the loss of Heaven or the fear of Hell — it is supernatural and meritorious.

Now, supernatural contrition may be either imperfect or perfect; and here we return to Perfect Contrition. Contrition is imperfect when we are sorry through fear of God. It is perfect when we are sorry through love of Him. In the first case, we are sorry for having offended God because we fear His just anger and punishment; in the second case, we are sorry because sin offends God, Who is so infinitely good and lovable.

Perfect Contrition springs from the perfect love of God, and our love for God is perfect when we love Him because He is infinitely perfect, infinitely beautiful, infinitely good in Himself, or because, by His innumerable gifts to us, He has shown His love for us. On the other hand, our love for God is imperfect when we love Him because we hope for some benefit from Him. But should this something be Himself in so much as He is our Supreme Good, then this would be perfect love.

From this, you will clearly see that when our love is imperfect we think principally of ourselves, of the benefits we have received; whereas, if it is perfect, we think principally of God — of the goodness of Him Who enriches us with His benefits. When our love is imperfect, we love the gifts we have received; when it is perfect, we love the Giver of these gifts, not so much for the gifts He gives as for the love and goodness that these gifts manifest in Him.

Sorrow Comes from Love.

Now, sorrow or contrition springs from love, and so it follows that our contrition will be perfect when we repent of our sins through the perfect love of God — that is, when we repent, because by sinning we offend God, Who is infinitely good and perfect and beautiful in Himself, and Who loves us so much. Our contrition will be imperfect if we repent through fear of God, because by sinning we have lost Heaven or merited the pains of Purgatory or Hell. When our sorrow is imperfect we think above all about ourselves, and of the punishment that our sins will bring on us in the next life in much the same way as a child is sorry for some fault because it fears a thrashing. With perfect contrition we think principally about God, about His greatness, His goodness, His beauty, His Love, all of which attributes we offend in sinning, and for which sins the God-Man, our Adorable Saviour, suffered so much. It is like a child repenting of a fault because it has grieved its parents, who are so good and loving, and have done so much for it.

One other little example will help to explain all this much better. After Saint Peter denied his Divine Master, he thought of his sin, and, “going out, wept bitterly.” Why did he weep? Perhaps for the shame he would feel in front of the other Apostles? If this was the reason, then his sorrow was purely natural and without merit for Heaven. Perhaps he feared being deprived of his dignity as an Apostle and Prince of the Apostles, or perhaps he feared losing Heaven. These certainly would be worthy motives, but still his sorrow would be imperfect. No, No! Peter wept and repented because he had offended his beloved Master, Who was so good, so holy, so worthy of his love; he wept because he had repaid that love with the blackest ingratitude, and, as a consequence, his contrition was perfect, his sin was forgiven. With this golden key he had again reopened the doors of Heaven, which he had closed a moment before by his triple denial. And, dear reader, have you not as much reason to detest your own sins? Certainly. The benefits you have received are more numerous than

the hairs on your head, and for each of these gifts you should exclaim with Saint John, “Let us love God Who has first loved us.”

The Love of God.

And how has God loved us? “I have loved you,” He says, “with an eternal love. I have had pity on you and drawn you to Myself.” (Jeremiah 31:3.) So He has loved us with an eternal love. Right from eternity, before you were born — aye, even before this world was made or the angels themselves were created. He turned towards you one of those loving looks that pierce the very heart; for you He created the heavens and the earth, for you He prepared a body and a soul with all the tenderness of a mother preparing for the coming of her child. It is God Who gave you life and keeps you in life; it is He Who from day to day gives you all those natural goods that you enjoy. Such a thought should be sufficient to induce the very pagans to the perfect love of God. But how much more reason have not you, a Christian, a Catholic, to love Him with a perfect love — you who experience a signal proof of His goodness and love, for “He has pity on you”?

You, in consequence of the fall of our First Parents, were condemned with the rest of mankind, but your Heavenly Father sent His only Son to be your Saviour and to redeem you with His Precious Blood. During His Agony in the Garden, He thought of you. He thought of you as His Blood flowed from the wounds caused by the cruel scourges and crown of thorns. It was of you He thought as He laboured under the heavy Cross up the hill of Calvary. It was of you He thought and for you He suffered as He expired in shame and agony on the Cross. Yes, He thought of you with as tender a love, as if you were the only person in the world, so that you can truly say with Saint Paul, “He loved me and gave Himself up to death for me.” What conclusion can you draw from all this? This, and this only — “Let us love God who has first loved us.”

Besides, God drew you to Himself by Baptism, the first and most important grace in this life, and by the Church into whose bosom you were then admitted. How many there are who find the True Church only after trials and sacrifices of every kind! How many, again, who never know it! But through the love and mercy of Almighty God, you were endowed with the gift of the True Faith in your cradle. He continues to draw you to Himself by means of the Sacraments and of innumerable other graces, both internal and external. You are, as it were, submerged in an ocean — in the ocean of divine love and mercy. Not satisfied with all these proofs of His love, He wishes to crown all these favours by placing you in Heaven, near to Himself, where you will be eternally happy. What return can you make for all this love? Nothing but love can repay love, and so do not all these proofs of His infinite love force us to love Him and to exclaim with Saint Paul, “*Caritas Christi urget nos*”? ‘The love of Christ constrains us’ to love Him in return.

Now, let us examine a little. How have you corresponded to the love of a God so loving and so lovable? Undoubtedly, with ingratitude and sin. But do you not now repent of such ingratitude? Ah! I have no doubt but that at this moment your heart burns with a desire of repairing such ingratitude by means of a whole-hearted love. If such is the case, then at this very moment, you have Perfect Contrition — that contrition, namely, that is founded on the love of God and is called Perfect Contrition, or Contrition of Love.

But this contrition may be of a still higher degree and consist in loving God simply because He is infinitely perfect, infinitely glorious, and worthy of being loved above every other thing, independent of His mercies towards us. Let us make a comparison. Astronomers tell us that in the firmament there are stars as large and as brilliant as the sun, but so far away that they are invisible

to the naked eye. Now, though these stars give us neither light nor warmth, are they not as worthy of our admiration as the sun itself? And suppose, now, that man had never experienced any benefits from that eternal Star — the Love of God; suppose that Almighty God had not created the earth or any living creature; He would not on this account be any less wise, less grand, less beautiful, less glorious, less worthy of love, because in Himself and through Himself, He is the Supreme Good. This is what we mean when we recite the words, “I detest my sins above every other evil because they displease You, my God, Who for Your infinite goodness are so deserving of all my love.” Reflect for a moment on the love of God — above all, think of the manifestation of this love in the sufferings of Our Divine Saviour. By this means, you will easily understand it, and, like a fiery dart, it will pierce and inflame your heart. Behold the practical way of exciting yourself to Perfect Contrition.

It is related in the life of the Curé d’Ars that on one occasion, a lady, a perfect stranger to him, asked him to pray for her husband, a careless Catholic, who had just died suddenly and without receiving the Sacraments. “He was so careless, Father,” she said, weeping; “he did not go to his duties, and whatever will become of him?” “Madam,” replied the saintly priest, “do you not remember the bouquet of flowers he picked every Saturday to decorate Our Lady’s altar? In return Our Blessed Lady obtained for him the grace to make an act of Perfect Contrition before dying, and he is saved.” The Curé had never before seen that lady, nor did he know her husband, but it was a fact that every Saturday he picked that bunch of flowers. Our Lady, in return for that very small token of love he showed her, placed in his hands at that supreme moment the Golden Key of Paradise.

II. HOW TO OBTAIN PERFECT CONTRITION.

First of all, we must bear in mind that Perfect Contrition is a grace — a great grace — from God. We should therefore constantly pray for it. Ask for it, not only when you wish to make an Act of Contrition, but often during the day. It should be the object of your most ardent desires. Repeat often, “My God! Give me perfect sorrow for my sins.” And if you sincerely mean what you say, Our Lord will hear your prayer.

Before the Crucifix.

Besides this, here is an easy way of making an Act of Contrition. Kneel down before a crucifix in a church or in your room, or, if you cannot do this, imagine yourself to be in the presence of Jesus Christ, and, while looking at His wounds, think for a few moments, and then repeat these or similar words, “Who is This nailed to a Cross? It is Jesus — my God and Saviour. And see how He suffers! His Body covered with wounds and blood; His Soul submerged in anguish and humiliations. Why does He suffer? For the sins of mankind, and so for mine also. In the abyss of His torments, He is thinking of me. He is suffering for me. He is making reparation for my sins.” Remain there at the foot of the Cross while the Blood of your Saviour falls drop by drop on your soul. Ask yourself how you have corresponded with these proofs of love. Call to mind your past sins, and, forgetting for a moment both Heaven and Hell, repent because your sins have reduced your Saviour to so pitiable a state. Promise Him that you will not crucify Him again, and then slowly and fervently repeat the Act of Contrition. Better still, repeat those words of sorrow that will spontaneously rise up in your heart, now softened by grace and filled with a holy bitterness.

Three Visits.

It will not be out of place to call to mind here what Saint Charles Borromeo taught his penitents when they went to Confession. “Do you wish,” he used to say, “to know an easy way of exciting yourselves to true sorrow for your sins? Make three little visits — the first above, the second below, the third in the middle. Your visit up above will show you Paradise, which you have renounced for some empty pleasure, for some sinful thought, or word or act. The displeasure that will arise in your heart at the thought of this loss will be good attrition, or imperfect contrition, and in Confession will suffice to wash away your sins.

“Your visit below will show you that frightful place in which you would be now if God had exercised His justice — that place where you would for ever suffer the torment of fire, far from your true home, which is Heaven. The sorrow arising from this consideration is also excellent, and sufficient in Confession.

“Your third visit will show you Christ crucified and dying for you on Calvary amid pains and insults of every description. The knowledge that the Crucified One is Infinite Goodness Itself, your greatest Benefactor, Whom, instead of loving, you have insulted and crucified, will awaken in your heart sentiments of love and sorrow that will wipe away your sins even before you enter the confessional.”

Dear reader, remember these three visits of Saint Charles, not only when you go to Confession, but each time you wish to excite yourself to Perfect Contrition.

III. IS IT DIFFICULT TO MAKE AN ACT OF PERFECT CONTRITION?

No doubt, it is more difficult to make an act of Perfect Contrition than an Imperfect one, which suffices when we go to Confession. But still, there is no one who, if he sincerely wishes it, cannot, with the grace of God, make an act of Perfect Contrition. Sorrow is in the will, not in the senses or feelings. All that is needed is that we repent because we love God above everything else; that is all. True it is that Perfect Contrition has its degrees, but it is none the less perfect because it does not reach the intensity and sublimity of the sorrow of Saint Peter, of Saint Mary Magdalene, or of Saint Aloysius. Such a degree is very desirable, but is by no means necessary. A lesser degree, but, provided it proceeds from the love of God, and not through fear of His punishments, is quite sufficient. And it is very consoling to remember that for the 4000 years (or more, according to many Biblical scholars) before the coming of Christ the only means sinners had of obtaining pardon was this same Perfect Contrition. There was no Sacrament of Penance in those days. Even today for thousands — aye, for millions — of pagans, of non-Catholics, and of Catholics, too, who have no time to call a priest to their bedside, the only means of pardon and salvation is an act of Perfect Contrition.

Now, if it is true that God does not wish the death of a sinner, it follows that He does not wish to impose on His creatures a contrition or sorrow beyond their powers, but one that is within the reach of everyone. And so, if millions of poor creatures who, through no fault of their own, live and die outside the True Fold, if these can obtain the grace of Perfect Contrition, do you imagine, dear reader, that it will be difficult for you — you who enjoy the happiness of being a Christian and a Catholic, and so are capable of receiving much greater graces than they — you who are far better instructed in things divine than the poor infidels are?

But I dare to go even further. Often, very often, without even thinking of it, you have Perfect Contrition for your sins. For example, when you hear Mass devoutly or make the Stations of the Cross properly; when you reflect before your crucifix or an image of the Sacred Heart. What is

more, every time you say the “Our Father,” in the first three petitions you make three acts of perfect charity, each of which is sufficient to cancel every sin from your soul.

Very often, a few words suffice to express the most ardent love and the most profound sorrow — for instance, the little ejaculations, “My Jesus, mercy,” “My God and my All,” “My God, I love You above all things,” “My God, have mercy on me, a poor sinner.” Aided by the grace of God (and God has promised to give to all who ask), it is by no means difficult to make an Act of Contrition. Take the case of David, who for one curious look fell into the sin of adultery, and then of murder. Having committed these sins, he lived on quite unconcerned about the state of his soul till the prophet Nathan came to reprove him. And this reproach induced David to make an act of Perfect Contrition in a few words, “Peccavi Domino” (“I have sinned against the Lord” 2 Samuel 12:13). So efficacious was his contrition that the prophet, inspired by God, exclaimed, “The Lord has forgiven you.”

Take, again, the case of Mary Magdalen — a public sinner. She did not even say one word, but simply wept at the Feet of Jesus. Jesus saw the sorrow in her heart, and, turning to her, said: “Woman! because you have loved much your sins are forgiven you.” See, then, how little is needed — only to love God above everything. And love demands neither time nor trouble; it suffices to think of Jesus crucified, for it is impossible then not to love Him, and to be sorry for the sins by which we have crucified Him.

Remember the good thief — a robber condemned to death — and yet for those few words spoken from his heart, “Lord, remember me when You shall come into Your Kingdom,” he was immediately promised Heaven by Christ Himself: “Today, you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

Lastly, look at Saint Peter, who denied his Master three times. Jesus looked at him; Peter said not a single word, but, “going out, wept bitterly.” He was forgiven; he was chosen by Christ to be His first successor on earth — the Prince of the Apostles — and to-day is one of the most glorious saints in Heaven.

Dear readers, should we ever have the misfortune to offend God, let us give a look at the tabernacle where Jesus is palpitating with love for us, or let us think of Calvary. Our hearts will be touched. We will repent. We shall be forgiven and saved.

IV. THE EFFECTS OF PERFECT CONTRITION.

Forgiveness Even Before Confession.

Suppose the person before he makes an act of Perfect Contrition is in the state of mortal sin. Immediately, before even he goes to Confession — so long as he has the intention of going when opportunity offers — all his sins are forgiven. Not only is the eternal punishment of Hell remitted, but all his merits, which he had lost by sinning, are again restored to him. And if the person making this Act of Contrition is in the state of grace, his soul is strengthened against future temptations, his venial sins are forgiven, his purgatory is lessened, and the love of God increases in his soul. Behold the wonderful effects of the mercy of God produced in the soul of the Christian, and even in that of the pagan in good faith, by an act of Perfect Contrition.

Contrition Does Not Dispense With Confession.

Perhaps in reading this you will be surprised and inclined to say, “I can well understand that at the moment of death we should ask for the grace of Perfect Contrition, and that at that supreme

moment, it produces these wonderful effects, but I can scarcely credit that it has this power at all times, and when we are well and strong.” And yet, all this is perfectly true; it is as solid as the Rock on which the Church is built. In short, it is as certain as the Word of God. In the Council of Trent, the Church, under the assistance of the Holy Ghost, declared “that Perfect Contrition — that is, that which proceeds from the love of God — justifies man and reconciles him with God even before the reception of the Sacrament of Penance.” Of course, it is understood that such a person, if a Catholic, has at least the implicit intention of going to Confession. Now, the Council of Trent says nothing about the moment of death — it makes no distinction of time or circumstances, and so always and at any moment during life, this golden key opens the gates of Paradise. This declaration of Holy Church is simply the explanation of those words of Our Divine Saviour, “If anyone loves Me” (and no one can love Him without being sorry for having offended Him) — “if anyone loves Me, My Father will love Him, and We will come and dwell in him.” Now, since God cannot dwell in a soul stained with mortal sin, it follows that Perfect Contrition, or the Contrition of Charity, as it is called, banishes sin from the soul.

Such has always been the teaching of the Church, and when a heretic denied it, he was condemned by Rome. If, as we have already seen, Perfect Contrition produced these wonderful effects in the Old Law — the Law of Fear and Justice — with what greater reason should it not do so in the New Law — the Law of Mercy and Love?

But, seeing how efficacious Perfect Contrition is, seeing how it cleanses the soul even before Confession, you may be inclined to say, “Why, then, go to Confession at all? Was not Confession instituted by Jesus Christ for the remission of sins? And if Perfect Contrition remits sin even before Confession, where is the necessity of Confession?” This objection or difficulty is answered in the Catechism: “If we fall into sin we should make an Act of Contrition and go to Confession as soon as we can.” And the reason is because, though Perfect Contrition produces the same effects as Confession, it does not do so independently of Confession. Confession is the ordinary means instituted by Christ for the forgiveness of sin, and Perfect Contrition supposes the intention of confessing those sins already forgiven by this Act of Contrition. Without this intention, an Act of Contrition would not remit a single mortal sin. Should a person afterwards neglect to go to Confession, at least within the year, he would commit a mortal sin by wilfully disobeying one of the Commandments of the Church.

So, bear in mind that in order to make a good Act of Contrition we must have the intention of going to Confession. But when? Must one go at the first opportunity? Strictly speaking, no; since we are obliged to go but once a year, except in special circumstances — as, for instance, when we wish to receive Holy Communion. However, all theologians vividly exhort us to go as soon as possible, and for several reasons. We are more certain then that our sins are forgiven, for our contrition may not have been perfect. We thus enjoy greater peace of conscience, and we enrich our souls with the precious graces annexed to the Sacrament of Penance. When, for instance, you meet with an accident and injure, say, your hand or foot, what do you do? You immediately apply such home remedies as you know of, and then call the doctor at the first opportunity, for his prescriptions, you know, are authentic. And you should do the same for an injury to your soul — immediately say an Act of Contrition, which is the home remedy, and then, as soon as possible, have recourse to your spiritual doctor, who is your Confessor.

Again, someone might be inclined to say, “Since it is so easy to obtain pardon by means of an Act of Perfect Contrition, I need not worry any more. I can sin without scruple, and then simply make

an Act of Contrition, and all will be well.” Dear reader, anyone who would reason in this way would not have the shadow of sorrow. How could he say he loved God above everything when he intends to offend Him without scruple? When one is really sorry for having done something, he is resolved never to do it again. It may happen, and often does happen, that after one has sincerely repented of a sin, he is tempted again, and again falls into the same sin. This is quite a different thing. His contrition was good, because at the moment his resolution was sincere; but later, under a fresh temptation, he unfortunately fell again. All he can do is to repent once more, and resolve more firmly than ever to be more vigilant in the future.

Perfect Contrition is a great help to all those who sincerely wish to keep in the state of grace — to all those who, in spite of good intentions, through frailty, fall from time to time into mortal sin. But should anyone wish to abuse it as a means of sinning more freely, for him, instead of being a divine remedy, it would turn into an infernal poison.

Saint Augustine is the model of Perfect Contrition. Having spent a sinful youth and early manhood, he repented, and in his Confessions says: “Too late, oh Eternal Goodness! have I learned to know You, but for the future I will love You, I will never again offend You.” See how he coupled with his sorrow the resolution of sinning no more.

V. WHY IS PERFECT CONTRITION SO IMPORTANT, AND, AT TIMES, EVEN NECESSARY?

It is important during life, and especially at the moment of death, for the following reasons: —

Friends of God.

What greater happiness can we wish for in this life than to be in the state of sanctifying grace? It is this which beautifies the soul, which makes it a child of God and an heir to Heaven. It converts every good work and every suffering patiently borne into acts of merit. It is, as it were, a magic wand, converting everything into heavenly gold. On the other hand, what more unfortunate being is there than a person in mortal sin? All his past merits are lost, his soul is in danger of hell, all his good works, all his sufferings, even his prayers, are without the least merit for Eternity. How important, then, to be in the state of grace. And if a person does fall from this state, how can he again acquire it? There are two means — Confession and Perfect Contrition. Confession is the ordinary means, but as it is sometimes very difficult, and even impossible, to go to Confession, Almighty God, in His Goodness, has given us an extraordinary means, which is Perfect Contrition.

Suppose, which God forbid, that someday you have the misfortune of committing a mortal sin. After the distractions of the day, when you are at home in the quiet of the evening, your conscience will begin to trouble you, you will begin to feel ill at ease, and perhaps frightened, and with very good reason, too. What are you to do? God places in your hands the golden key that will reopen for you the Gates of Heaven that you closed during the day. Make an Act of Contrition from the motive of the love of God; resolve to sin no more, and to go to Confession when you can; then go peacefully to bed.

You are at peace with God, and if you die during the night, you will be saved.

On the contrary, how pitiable is the state of the man who is ignorant of Perfect Contrition! He goes to bed at night and rises in the morning an enemy of God; he continues in this fearful state for days and weeks, perhaps for months and years. This profound darkness into which his soul is plunged is unbroken except for a few days after each Confession; he then sins again, and remains in this state

till his next Confession. Unhappy man! To live practically all his life in mortal sin, an enemy of God, without merits for Heaven, and in constant danger of being lost eternally.

Before Holy Communion.

Of course, you would not think of going to Holy Communion after having committed a mortal sin and before going to Confession. Saint Paul insists: "Let a man prove himself first." (1 Corinth 11:28.) Let him go to Confession, and then partake of the Eucharistic Bread. Perfect Contrition is an efficacious, but at the same time an extraordinary, means of obtaining pardon — a means to be used when we cannot conveniently go to Confession, and we always have an opportunity of going before Communion. Still, we would do well to make an Act of Contrition immediately before Communion, to purify our souls more and more, and to receive more abundant fruits from this most holy Sacrament.

Again, the practice of making frequent Acts of Contrition is most advantageous for one who habitually lives in the state of grace. Apart from a special revelation from God, we cannot know for certain whether we are in His friendship or not; but every Act of Contrition lessens our anxiety on this point. Again, it often happens that we are in doubt as to whether we have given consent to a temptation or not. What are we to do? Examine our conscience? This is useless, for it will only bring back the temptation again, especially if against holy purity; and, moreover, we will never decide whether we have consented or not. No; make an Act of Perfect Contrition, as Saint Francis de Sales was accustomed to do, and worry no more. And even if it were revealed to us that we are in the state of grace, Perfect Contrition would still be most advisable. Every act increases sanctifying grace in our souls, one degree of which is worth more than all the riches of this world. Each act cancels any venial sins that stain our souls, which, in consequence, increase in fervour and sanctity. Each act of perfect love remits some of our purgatory. What did Our Divine Saviour say to Mary Magdalen? "Because you have loved much, much is forgiven you." If, in order to lessen our purgatory, we gain Indulgences, do good works, give alms, then the perfect love of God, which is the queen of virtues, merits the very first place among all the virtuous acts we perform.

Finally, every Act of Contrition strengthens our souls, and so increases our confidence of obtaining that greatest of all graces — the grace of final perseverance. What accumulation of graces does not this practice of frequent acts of Perfect Contrition obtain for us!

At the Moment of Death.

But, if this practice is so important during life, it reaches the height of its importance at the moment of death, especially when death comes too suddenly to call the priest. Take the case when, some years ago, a fire broke out in a large tenement house and many were cut off from escape by the flames. Among these was a boy of twelve years, who, falling on his knees, loudly recited an Act of Contrition, and invited all to join with him. How many, perhaps, of those unfortunate victims owe their eternal salvation to that boy? Now, dangers surround us every day. You or I, which God forbid, may one day be the victim of an accident — a kicking or bolting horse, a motor-car out of control, a slip on a stairs, a fall off a tram or train, a falling tree — there are a thousand and one ways by which death may come suddenly. A stroke may come when we are at our work or at our meals — suddenly, when least expected. Someone may run for a priest, but he may not arrive in time. What are you to do? Immediately make an act of Perfect Contrition. Don't wait to see if the priest will arrive in time, but immediately repent for having offended and crucified so good a God. You will be saved. Perfect Contrition will be for you the Golden Key of Paradise.

But do not delude yourself with the thought that you will put off your repentance till the moment of death, and that then you will make an act of Perfect Contrition. Perfect Contrition is a grace given only to those of good will, and if anyone were to abandon himself to a life of sin with the hope of a death-bed repentance, he would find himself face to face with a Judge Who will say, “You will seek Me, but you will die in your sins.” (See John 8:21.)

Will I have sufficient time in case of a sudden death to make an Act of Contrition? With the grace of God, yes. It requires very little time, especially if during life you have made a practice of exciting yourself frequently; it is not necessary to say even one word. Besides, when death is imminent, instants seem like hours. The mind is very active, and, added to this, Almighty God will be most lavish with His graces at that supreme moment.

What irreparable evils are caused through ignorance at the time of an accident! People rush from every side to render assistance. Some begin to cry; everyone loses his head; one rushes for a doctor, perhaps another for a priest; someone calls for water and begins to apply first-aid remedies — and all the time the unfortunate victim is dying. Except for the one who sent for the priest, no one has compassion on his soul — no one suggests an Act of Contrition. Should you ever be present at an accident, run quickly but calmly to the victim, give him a crucifix to kiss if you have one, and then slowly and clearly ask him to repeat with his heart what you are about to say. Then slowly and distinctly repeat an Act of Contrition, even though the dying man may not seem to hear or understand you. A soul that you may save in this way will be your crown in Heaven.

Do you know, dear reader, who will most naturally make an Act of Contrition when necessity arises? He, of course, who was most accustomed to make one every day, in every danger, after every sin, only such a one, when the occasion arises, will know how to manage quickly and swiftly the Golden Key of Paradise.

VI. WHEN SHOULD WE MAKE AN ACT OF CONTRITION?

Every Night.

All you who have followed me thus far, I beg of you, for the love of God and of your immortal souls, to make this act every night before retiring. This I ask, not because you are obliged in conscience to do so, but because I know it is for your good. Do not tell me that daily examination of conscience and Perfect Contrition are good only for priest and religious; don't make the excuse that you have not the time, or are too tired in the evenings. For how long does it take to make an Act of Contrition? Half an hour? A quarter of an hour? No; a few minutes are quite sufficient. I suppose you say a few prayers before going to bed. Very well! Having finished these prayers, think for a moment or two as to what sins you have committed during the day — you will hardly need to think if you have fallen grievously, for such a sin will rise naturally to your remembrance — then slowly and fervently recite an Act of Contrition, preferably before a crucifix or picture of Our Lady. And then go to bed in peace, for you are at peace with God. Begin this very evening, and never omit this most excellent practice. Should you ever have the misfortune of committing a mortal sin, do not remain in this awful state for an instant — on the spot, or at least before going to bed, say an Act of Contrition, and then go to Confession when you can.

One day, dear reader, sooner or later, the hour of your death will come, and if, which God forbid, it comes suddenly, you now know the key with which to open Heaven. If you have been faithful in making frequent Acts of Contrition during life, I assure you that you will have both the time and the grace to make one at that supreme moment, and thus save your soul. And if you are given sufficient

time to prepare for death, let your last prayer be an act of love towards God, your Creator, your Redeemer, and your Saviour — an act of sincere and perfect contrition for all the sins of your whole life. Then throw yourself with childlike confidence into the arms of Divine Mercy, for God will be for you a merciful and compassionate Judge.

And now I leave you. Read and re-read this little book. Get others to read it, and put into practice its precious lessons. Often repeat your Act of Contrition, a simple means, as you have seen, of obtaining pardon, the supreme and only means in case of necessity, a source of grace both during life and particularly at the hour of death—in short, “THE GOLDEN KEY OF PARADISE.”

VARIOUS ACTS OF CONTRITION.

1. O my God, I am sorry that I have sinned against You, for You are so good; I will never sin again. O pardon me and help me with Your grace.
 2. O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest my sins above every other evil; because they displease You, my God, Who, for Your infinite goodness, are so deserving of all my love; and I firmly resolve, by Your holy grace, never more to offend You, and to amend my life.
 3. O my God, from the bottom of my heart I am sorry for all my sins, because by them I deserve Your just punishment in this life and in the next; because I have been ungrateful to You, my greatest Benefactor, and, above all, because I have offended You, the Most Perfect and the Most Amiable Good, my Saviour, Who has died on the Cross for my sins, I am firmly resolved to amend my life, never more to offend You, and to avoid the occasions of sin.
 4. O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, because You are so very good, and I firmly purpose by the help of Your grace not to offend You again.
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