

# The Fighting Man

## Saint Paul

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MAY I BEGIN this booklet by setting the stage, – if you will allow that hackneyed phrase? I want to picture you to myself, dear reader, sitting this evening at your tea with the wireless turned on, listening-in to the news. Presently there is a pause in the announcer's speech, he clears his throat slightly, and says in a more than usually impressive tone that he has a surprise item to tell the world. You lean forward a little, balancing your cup of tea in mid-air, you sign with a frown to three-year-old Jimmy to keep still, and then the message fills your kitchen or dining room.

Radio Eireann proclaims that word has come of the conversion of some notorious enemy and persecutor of the Church. The news strikes the world like a thunder-bolt that such a man has thus, so unexpectedly changed sides. And, the announcement continues, not only has he placed himself under instruction with a view to being received into the Church. It is further to be put on record that his intention is to study for the priesthood.

Surprise is not the word, – that such a man should consecrate himself irrevocably to the defence of the Christ and His Church, which hitherto he has execrated. Next morning the paper confirms the report. There are various surmises and various explanations but no one seems able to assign definitely the real reason for so extraordinary an event. Whatever be the explanation one fact has emerged, – it is the truth that this erstwhile bigot, persecutor, tyrant, has received an immense grace to see the error of his ways and to spend the rest of his life in reparation.

Thanks be to God, says every true Catholic heart. You are immensely gratified and your only fear is that the story might prove too good to be true. Something not altogether unlike that did actually take place, – "at the time my story opens," to revert a second time to a well-worn phrase. Once upon time an avowed enemy and persecutor of Christ's Church, a man who had sworn he would exterminate Christ's Name did capitulate in this way. He developed into a most ardent apostle of this Christ and his conversion struck all beholders with amazement and incredulity.

Saul was his name, Saul of Tarsus. As a boy, he had been brought up in the narrow, strait-laced ways of the Pharisees. His teacher Gamaliel trained him from the cradle to hate and oppose in the domain of religion, anything that savoured of innovation. The boy proved to be a strong, indomitable character, with a will like a bar of steel. So, when he came to hear about this new Prophet with His fantastic ideas, it was little to be wondered at that with his upbringing and natural bent, the blood in his veins boiled with indignation. He was, to be sure, a truly religious man, but his religious sense was suffering very sadly from misdirection. When he heard about Stephen, – some fanatic who had declared himself a follower of Christ and insisted on preaching about Him, – when Saul and his teachers learned this, they promptly resolved to track the man down, and silence

him forever. Stephen was seized and pelted with stones till he fell before them begging even in death that God would deal mercifully with his murderers.

It was the right course, thought this ardent youth. He was there at Stephen's death, and while the grown-ups flung the stones, Saul held their coats and encouraged them lustily in their good work. Serve him right, this hair-brained follower of this dreamer of dreams! What had been done to him, would teach the rest of the gang to stop their nonsense. Dare they now continue in their efforts to overthrow the established religion!

It was in this atmosphere and with these ideals, that Saul grew into manhood. One day, – he was now about thirty, – this fire-eater was riding with a band of soldiers into the city of Damascus. He had demanded this escort from the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, for the exasperating report had reached his ears that there were men in Damascus professing themselves Christians. Saul's wrath reached boiling point! ...So the movement was spreading, in spite of all! But obstinacy only thrives on opposition. Saul vowed that not a man would he leave in the city who declared for this Christ. He would have them bound and brought back as prisoners, or, if need be, he would slay them on the spot.

"And as he went on his journey it came to pass that he drew nigh to Damascus. And suddenly a light from heaven shined round about him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him: 'Saul, Saul, why persecute you Me?' Who said: 'Who are You, Lord?' And He: 'I am Jesus Whom you persecute. It is hard for you to kick against the goad.'

"And he, trembling and astonished said: 'Lord, what will You have me to do?' And the Lord said to him: 'Arise and go into the city, and there it shall be told you what you must do' ... And Saul arose, and when his eyes were opened he saw nothing. But they, leading him by the hands, brought him to Damascus."

Saul stood up a new man. That light shining round about him had sent its rays into the innermost secret places of the man's soul and revealed him to himself. But it showed him something more. Dazzled though he was as he knelt there on the dusty roadside, he could still shade his eyes and look at the source from which the light was emanating. It was falling upon him from the face of Jesus Christ, from Him Who claimed to be the light of the world, that light which Saul in his infatuation and blindness had hitherto attempted to trample to extinction. But today he sees his mistake. Today he has caught a glimpse of the beauty of that countenance. Today he recognises that that beauty is divine. The Christ Whom Saul was persecuting hitherto, is in very truth the anointed Son of God.

Nothing short of "an audacious grace" could win such an unbending character, but once won, all the old zeal and dynamic energy would be let loose again and Saul, now become Paul, would be eaten up with an insatiable craving to din the message into the ears of every man on the face of the earth, and to light in the hearts of all, that flame of enthusiasm and personal love for Jesus Christ which had begun to blaze up on that eventful day. The great Jesuit missionary, Saint Francis Xavier, is often compared with Saint Paul, and of Xavier Saint Ignatius used to say that he was the toughest clay he ever had to handle! Both men were of the type that must be great. They would not, could not, be satisfied with half measures. Put them on the road that leads to forbidden pleasures and they will run till they have tasted every sinful delight. Set their feet on the way to God and nothing will daunt them. Greatness they must have, and the higher the pinnacle and the steeper the climb the more do they revel in the effort. Difficulties exist only to be overcome.

Yes, he was of tough fibre. Jesus Whom he had persecuted in his ignorance now becomes, in his new-found knowledge, the Friend and Lover by Whom he is completely captivated, the Model Whom he will imitate, the God Whose message is to be preached in season and out of season, even if the preacher must pay for his preaching with his blood. Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ, Who is God, loves men and by His death opened heaven for them. Jesus Christ has deigned to single out this man, this bigot and persecutor, to be His vessel of election, to bear His message to the ends of the earth. In face of this, what else can Paul do but allow his heart to be inundated with joy at the honour of being thus chosen? What can he do but stiffen that already strong will of his to face every sacrifice, any sacrifice, to count all things which the world values as so much rubbish, if by this means that fire of love for Christ will be enabled to expand in his great soul, and even burst its boundaries and sweep from him in mighty onrush into the souls of others?

Nothing is easier than to illustrate the grip by which the love of Christ fastened upon Paul's heart, for the Name he once hated is now ever on his lips. There is no Name he loves to write more; in his letters; that Sacred Name occurs more than two hundred times. He might be said to have been transformed into Christ. He can speak of nothing except Christ and His love and His designs for the souls of men. His mind is fed continually with schemes to further the kingdom of Christ. And, having once been thus caught in the toils, Paul is ready and even eager to stand up to every test.

Turn over the pages, casually almost, of those wonderful letters of his, and every page, you might nearly say every line, seems to vibrate with the passionate devotion to Our Lord which now consumes his heart.

Ask this erstwhile hater of Christ what now he values most and you are told: "The things that were gain to me, the same I have counted loss for Christ. Furthermore, I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord..." Question him about his hopes and he tells you his conversation is in heaven, "from whence also we look for the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ." What are the man's consolations in the midst of trials? "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also by Christ does our comfort abound." He preaches with eloquence and conviction, – why? Because his words are inspired by Him Whose love has captivated him. "We preach Christ and Him crucified... Jesus Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Christ and Christ's Cross are his glory. – "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ by Whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world." "I judged not myself to know anything amongst you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

He can say no more than that he lives with the very life of Christ Himself: "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." His language of devotedness reaches perhaps its climax in the passionate outburst, which closes his eighth chapter to the Romans: "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? Or distress? Or famine? Or nakedness? Or danger? Or persecution? Or the sword?... But in all these things, we overcome, because of Him that has loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The knowledge and deep personal love of Jesus Christ have become the very core and centre of his existence. And, probing a little more deeply, we find three great truths concerning Jesus of Nazareth which sank into the marrow of his being and which he laboured to preach "in season and out of season."

Christ is, first of all, the Model of Paul's external behaviour. He kept his eyes fixed upon this Man. He scrutinised every single detail pertaining to His life, and then he set himself the task of re-living that life in its external manifestations as perfectly as was possible for a mere man to do. The image of Christ moved always before his eyes, and the question uppermost in his mind was always: "If He were now in my place, how would He act? If He had to deal with this sinner what would be his treatment? If He were kneeling here in prayer, how would He pray? If Jesus were with me in this prison, in this encounter with the sly, insincere, twisting enemies, – what would He say to them? Would He lash them with invective as He did in the case of the Pharisees and Scribes, or would He keep silence as when He was reviled before Herod? If Jesus were here at this piece of work, how would He do it?"

And so in every detail, – waking or sleeping, eating, journeying, alone or in company, – in all these things Jesus moved before the eyes of the apostle and all he wanted was to try constantly to reproduce in himself the manner of acting he beheld in his divine model. "Be ye imitators of me," he wrote, "as I am of Him." Just as an artist labours to transfer to his canvas as perfect a likeness as possible of the model posing for him, so does Paul make it his aim in life to speak and act in all things as he believes Christ would have done.

But Jesus has become much more than this for the apostle. From Him, as from a fountain-head, there flows into the soul a wonderful principle of a new life called sanctifying grace. Hence, Paul's care to maintain close and constant contact with this Christ. In the measure in which this contact is maintained in the same will grace flow from Christ into the soul. And the streams of divine life thus flowing from Christ into the soul will gradually engulf another stream of another life, – the life of selfishness, the life of sin, which raises an obstacle against the expansion of the divine life. Hence, Paul chastised his body and faced incessant toil, because he understood very well that by such stern measures only can the sin and selfishness so deeply sunk in his nature be reduced to the state of submissiveness that is proper to them.

And Paul, in the third place, having discovered the blessed sweetness of belonging to Christ, having come to realise the treasures he had been missing, was "urged" by the love of Christ burning within him, to share his treasure with others. This is the explanation of his boundless zeal, of the hunger for souls that consumed him and made him fixed in his resolve to slave as long as there was life in his body in the effort to bring Christ to souls and souls to Christ.

Jesus Christ thus became for the converted Paul, the Model towards which He constantly looked in order to direct himself in his external conduct. Christ became for him, secondly, the source from which he drank in the waters of divine life, those waters of sanctifying grace, which, spreading themselves abroad in his soul gradually took possession of those places in the soul which sin had occupied hitherto. And Paul is now driven mightily by the force of Christ's grace, to spend himself for Christ and the souls He loves with such intensity.

A truly marvellous transformation!

Remember who he had been, the man toughened by his early education, toughened by a character naturally strong and determined, so toughened that he once reviled and loathed that Name, – think of all that and you are not surprised that his conversion was the talk of the countryside, and that many suspected his sincerity. Ananias, a man living in Damascus at the time of the vision, on being told by the Lord to go and meet Saul and restore him his sight, thought fit to expostulate: "Lord, I have heard by many of this man and how much evil he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem."

The inhabitants of the town, on learning of the conversion and preaching were sceptical: "Is not this he who persecuted in Jerusalem those who called upon this Name, and came hither for that intent, that he might carry them bound to the chief priests?" You and I might ask the same about our convert in the news, if he entered the ranks of the priesthood. The miracle of grace was not much greater in the case of the man breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Tough clay!

Every detail of this wonderful man's story and turning to God should fill you and me with encouragement. I suppose you could not, to begin with, find a more unpromising subject to be transformed into a saint and ardent lover of Christ. He calls himself the greatest of sinners, and he recalls how he persecuted the Church of God and wasted it, "beyond measure." Now it is quite true that there are saints in the Church's calendar whose lives edify us indeed but perhaps also make us despair of ever attaining to anything great in the spiritual life ourselves. You will read of those who never sinned grievously, who seem to have been especially protected by God from infancy. But Saint Paul does not belong here. He had a bad record, and that is why his example encourages and inspires.

Sinners we have been, and by all means let us strike our breasts with sincere humility about it. But far be it from us, with the example of Paul before our eyes, to deceive ourselves into the foolish notion that our past must prevent our future. Rather can it help powerfully. Saul would possibly never have been urged by the love of Christ to undertake such herculean labours if he had not been haunted by the memory of what he had done in the past against that great Lover. Life was still his in which to atone, and never did man fling himself more whole-heartedly into the work of atoning.

And let me not imagine that he got there without a struggle. When I read of his great graces, I am inclined to say: "Small thanks to him! See how privileged he was, how his soul was enriched with special graces. Look at the way God revealed Himself to him on the Damascus Road. Read about his visions of heaven. He was wrapt to the third heavens. He was permitted to see into divine secrets to express which mere human language was quite inadequate. All he can tell us is that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what things God has prepared for those who love him. Small thanks to a man thus privileged to slave for Christ and for souls. If I were so favoured, I'm sure I too might hope to be a saint. But as things are..."

Now there is a modicum of truth in all this. It is quite true that Paul did receive those special graces and helps. But always remember that he was "a soldier of Christ Jesus," and no soldier wants to spend his life marking time. Paul was surrounded on every side by enemies, – foes within and without, – but the man that was in him toughened and exulted in the fight for victory.

In proof of this turn again to his account of those stupendous visions with which his soul was favoured. He tells his Corinthians that he was so inundated with light that whether he was in the body or out of the body he knew not. But what he did know was that God vouchsafed to reveal to His servant secrets of heaven so ravishing that his whole being was aflame with divine love. And then, in that very same passage, he goes on to tell about a fierce and persistent temptation which was permitted to assail him "lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me." There was given to him an angel of Satan to buffet him, a sting of the flesh to war with him and try to inject its poison. What a source of consolation to those who are trying to follow him but are inclined to be discouraged because this particular temptation seems to be always dogging their steps!

Does Paul allow himself to be discouraged thus? Not a bit of it. In his distress, he turns to God in fervent prayer. Three times over, he begs and importunes to be delivered. And God refuses deliverance. "My grace is sufficient for you. Virtue is made perfect in infirmity." As though He would say: "I am not going to free you from this troublesome temptation, but what I will do is to give you grace to fight it and conquer." And Paul, so far from showing the white feather is heartened all the more for the fight. "Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities... For when I am weak, then I am strong." He recognises indeed his own weakness, but, what is of infinitely greater importance, he sees too, very clearly, that he has the very strength of Christ Himself to support him in the fight.

Such a man cannot but be a powerful incentive to a holy life. Such a combination between the divine and the human, between strength and weakness, cannot but help those of us who feel at times that we really cannot keep going any longer.

It seems certain that there are many men and women who are good enough Catholics, but they would be somewhere near the saints only for the canker-worm known as human respect.

They are ashamed to act up to their consciences, afraid of being laughed at or held up to ridicule by those who object to taking their religion too seriously. Under such criticism, a weak character will crumple, but it is in face of opposition or cynicism that the vigour and manliness of sanctity grows to maturity. Hostility should not make a man irritated or testy. He should see that it comes from God's hand, – like the blows of the chisel on the block of marble, – to beautify the soul all the more.

All this is easy to see in Saint Paul. His one concern is to be right in God's sight. "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you... I am not conscious to myself of anything, yet am I not herein justified. He that judges me is the Lord." So he went on his way placidly, refusing to be beaten when men laughed at him, as they did when he preached in the Areopagus; yielding not when he knew that false brethren were spying upon him; persevering with heroic constancy in the teeth of a whole series of persecutions and trials which he catalogues for his Corinthians. "Of the Jews five times did I receive forty stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned: thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I was in the depths of the sea. In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils from my own nation, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils from false brethren. In labour and painfulness, in much watchings, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness... At Damascus... through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and so escaped... I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ... I seek not the things that are yours, but you... I most gladly will spend and be spent myself, for souls..."

Admittedly, it is hard to stop quoting the words of this intrepid soldier who faced all this undauntedly for the sake of the Christ Whom he glimpsed on the Damascus Road, and for the souls so dear to Him. But enough has surely been said to prove the manliness of Saint Paul, and to dispel the silly notion that because he was favoured with visions and special graces that therefore he did not have to fight hard for his crown of glory. Christ and the spread of the Gospel are his one preoccupation. Personal sufferings do not count. Opposition does not matter. He does not care even, – as he writes from his prison (was it in Ephesus, in Rome or in Jerusalem), – if some who preach Christ do so from imperfect motives. "Some... preach out of envy and contention, but some also out

of good will, preach Christ; some out of charity... and some... not sincerely... But what then? So that by all means... Christ be preached, in this I rejoice and will rejoice." (Philippians 1:15-18.)

And he would not be deterred in his efforts to spread the Gospel by lack of talent. He relies for success, not upon the persuasive words of human wisdom. "Brethren," he reminds the Corinthians, "when I came to you, I came, not in loftiness of speech or of wisdom... I judged not myself to know anything among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified... We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery... which none of the princes of this world knew."

There you have him, this giant of Christ, beginning with such a huge handicap, enlightened indeed and strengthened indeed by special graces, but buffeted and attacked on all sides by trials and infirmities of exceptional magnitude.

What sustained him? Why did he become an apostle? Was it that he was going to gain materially by his apostolate? We have seen that, in the natural order, it brought him nothing but suffering and contradiction. Was it that he tired of the very prosaic existence of the Pharisees, and grew weary of their hair-splitting arguments over points of the law? Did he go out on his missions in order to win renown for himself, to be venerated by the common people as a sort of hero, to hear his praises on every lip? No. For none of these things did Paul care. He became an apostle because on the Damascus Road "he learned Christ."

On that never-to-be-forgotten day, Paul was seized upon by the love and the loveliness of Jesus of Nazareth. On that day, he came to understand that Jesus was God. Everything else right and left of that one fact fell away. Paul saw the reality in life; he discerned between the shadow and the substance. The love of Jesus devoured his great heart; hungrily he fed his soul on the knowledge and the love of the God-Man; the yearning to make the whole world see, as he himself sees now, became a kind of torment; Paul could never be the same again; he could never again be even moderate in his love; in his quest for souls, personal gain, personal misfortune, personal reputation, – what did he care about these things; if only Jesus was loved more, known better, offended less; if only Paul could call the whole world together and awaken in the hearts of all men a response to the appeal of the Heart of Christ?

We Catholics of today could do with more of his spirit. Saul the persecutor shows us that there is no such thing as a hopeless case. Paul the man of prayer, lifted up into the heights where his soul is bathed in the light divine, lets us see how a loving God forgives and restores us to intimacy if we allow Him.

Paul, standing sword in hand, manfully doing battle against the hydra-headed enemies of his soul and the souls of others, gives us to understand that temptation need not alarm us, – on the contrary, it must be part of our expected programme as members of the Militant Church. Paul, brave under trials of every sort, refusing to be beaten, rejoicing even and exulting in the very thick of the fray, shows us that it is a privilege to be asked to give to Christ something that really costs.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that the apostle was carried away by a blind unreasoning enthusiasm. You will never make a Paul or a Xavier without enthusiasm, but it is the enthusiasm that knows and appreciates thoroughly the sanity of the cause for which it strives.

When Our divine Lord called for volunteers, He urged them first to sit down and reckon what the cost was going to be. A king, He said, going to war, will enquire beforehand about the strength of the king who is marching against him. If he finds himself completely outnumbered and sees that the

inevitable result must be wholesale slaughter of his men, he will be wise to sue for peace in good time. A man who sets out to build a tower, must first of all sit down and calculate the cost. If he has not enough money, he ought never to begin to build. Otherwise, the half-built tower will stand there an eye-sore, and the man's enemies will laugh at him for his folly.

So the king considers carefully, and the man estimates the cost. And you too, concludes Our Lord, if you want to come and be an apostle, reckon what the cost is going to be. And what is it? "Unless a man renounce everything that he has, he cannot be My disciple." Never did any mere man dare to make such a claim. It is true that Christ encourages our frailty by the hope of a reward exceeding great, and that He assures us most emphatically that even in this valley of tears the man who labours generously for Christ discovers, even here, a corner of Paradise. But still the hard saying is never revoked. "Unless a man renounce everything..." The apostle sees very clearly that in point of fact the saying is hard. But he discerns farther, for deep personal love of Christ wins his heart. Zeal is not the result of mere intellectual conviction. It is also a fire that blazes up in the heart. Hence, the apostle sees and loves passionately, and it is the result of this union that makes him sweep ruthlessly out of his life any obstacle to the development of Christ's love in his own soul. It is the same combination of conviction and love that drives him forward to crush the enemies of God and to restore to Christ the souls He died to save. "If," says a Kempis, "if you rely more upon your own reason than upon the virtue that subjects to Jesus Christ, you will seldom or hardly become an enlightened man. For God will have us wholly subject to Him and to transcend all reason by an inflamed love."

To transcend reason – not to oppose reason. The enlightened man judges by a standard higher than reason. In some such way as vision transcends faith, in the same would the light vouchsafed to a man like Saint Paul rise above the light of mere reason. No mere dry calculating service will drive a man to undertake the labours and fastings and hardships we have seen in the apostle's life. The conviction is there indeed, – as the dry faggots are on the hearth, – but it takes the spark of personal love and enthusiasm to set the fire ablaze.

In the first part of our paper, we were concerned mainly with the element of personal love, which characterised his apostolate. Now it is in place to study the principles, the intellectual convictions which lay at the base of this deep affection for the man Christ Jesus. These too, must be of immense help to us who are so needed by the Church in the trials and dangers surrounding her in these days.

Now I find in the account of Paul's conversion that there are three fundamental principles implied, and on these the great apostle's future labours will rest as on a secure support. There is, first of all, Saul's own question to Christ, – "Lord what will You have me to do?"

All true zeal must, therefore, begin with a determination to preserve an unquestioning obedience to the will of God. In this place, we are not thinking so much of the Will of God as made known clearly in the Ten Commandments. A man who would pretend to be keen on Christ's interests must take for granted that his devotion to Him is counterfeit unless it be accompanied by at least a serious and consistent effort to avoid sin.

But enlightened zeal is quick to detect also what is called the will of God's "good pleasure." A parent who loves does not wish to be always issuing commands, and a loving child will be on the watch to do for the parent little gracious acts of thoughtfulness for the mere purpose of giving pleasure to the parent. Now God, our loving Father, has assigned each of us a vocation in life. For one person that vocation is the priesthood or the religious state, for another it is married life, and



with it a certain profession or trade. Now within that vocation there is a way of living a life of very intense devotion to the Will of God.

Take two girls in an office, or two doctors, or two fathers or mothers of families. One of these, in each case, does her or his job just to make a living, or to attain to success, or to satisfy a perfectly legitimate desire of the human heart, namely to be settled down and have a home and family. But these motives are merely natural, though obviously they are not sinful motives. Suppose that girl behind that counter could train herself to see her work and position as an indication of the Will of God. Suppose that in that exacting employer, whom perhaps you rightly consider unjust or a perfect "crank," – suppose that in him, none the less you saw a man who had over you an authority from God. What a change that must make at once! Granted that he is rude, unkind, snappy, it still remains true that what he tells you to do or not to do, is the expression of God's Will in your regard! God actually speaks to you through him. Therefore, you do or avoid, not because you will get into trouble, not because you might lose your job, – at least that is not your principal motive. What is it? My eagerness to do God's Will, and my recognition of that Will in the behests of this ungracious, thankless man, – who takes His place.

Again. You are father or mother. Mother has to look after the house, wash the dishes, make the beds, cook the dinner. Why? Because God has placed her in that state of life, and these duties she does as perfectly as possible as being an indication of what He wishes her to do. It is quite surprising how this power to recognise God's Will in the commonplace elevates everything you do, and gives a new and refreshing turn to your whole life.

Father in the family does his day's work outside in the same spirit, – not merely to support his family, but to support his family because supporting a family is what God wants him to do. His day's toil, be it as humble as breaking stones, is thus super-naturalised and filled with new meaning and new value. "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Zeal must rest on unswerving loyalty to His Will, and that Will can be found in the duties of my state of life.

It is clear from this too, that zeal which is exercised at the cost of sacrificing what is God's Will, is not the genuine article. If God's Will for a mother is to be giving breakfast to her family, she should not be at Mass. If God's Will for me is to sit in my office and type out these tiresome lists, it is wrong for me to close down half an hour before time in order to visit the sick or help the poor. If God's Will assigns to me the duty of breaking stones, He definitely wants me breaking stones rather than kneeling before Him in the Tabernacle.

"Lord, what will You have me to do?" When Saul asked the question, Our Lord directed him to go into the city and there he would be told. At Damascus, Ananias came, instructed by God, and delivered to Saul his instructions. Why did not Christ tell Saul directly Himself? He might easily have done so, but it is His way to employ secondary agents. Merit is thus increased. Saul obeyed Ananias, you obey that impossible employer, but ultimately both of you are obeying God Himself. Small thanks to you to obey if Christ Himself was sitting there in that shop or office and telling you what to do, but to bend your will and cheerfully to submit when His instructions come through such a channel may not be easy, but it is the test of your zeal and devotedness to God's Will.

Does not all this throw much light on the perfect Model of true zeal, Jesus Christ? He summed up His life's task in one sentence, – "the things that are pleasing to My Father I always do." At the end, He could say, as He sat there at the Last Supper: "Father, I have finished the work which You gave Me to do." Yet, there was much left undone. What had He achieved, after all? Not much as the

world estimates achievement. He had spent most of His life hidden away in despised Nazareth, and when at last He did come out and show Himself to the world, He antagonized the people with power and influence, and drew after Him "only" the poor and the ignorant. Even these ran away at the end and Jesus died "a failure" on Calvary. "A failure?" – What an immense source of consolation that word spells when applied to Him! Think of the thousands of hidden souls in a big city, – living unnoticed and unknown, but they love Him and spend their days and their nights trying to atone to Him for the ingratitude of the greater number. A failure? Go into the hospitals or visit the homes of the sick, and count up those thousands whose days pass uneventfully, often with no prospect of "recovery", years perhaps lying in that position and unable to move without assistance. There is a great mystery in such "failures" as there is a great mystery in the "failure" of Calvary, and the only key to unlock the mystery is a perception of the truth that nothing is of the smallest importance except in so far as it is God's Will. "Lord what will You have me to do?"

There is a second searching principle to be learned on the Damascus Road. Our Lord said to Saul: "Saul, Saul, why persecute you Me?... I am Jesus Whom you persecute." Herein is revealed to Saul the doctrine of the Mystical Body which ever afterwards was to be so near to his heart, and which he would expound so wonderfully in his letters and spoken word.

The truth comes home to him as he kneels here on the ground that all he has been doing, – crushing those Christians, causing them to suffer and die, – all that, is actually done to Jesus Himself. "I am Jesus Whom you persecute."

Why is this, except that Christians and Christ are so closely united, that – to use the analogy which Paul will later use himself, – they form one great body. As in the human body there are many members, and all the members help each other, and all the members are enriched with the same life blood, – so does the grace of God's Holy Spirit flow from Christ into the souls of those who are united with Him, and He and they form altogether one great organism, the Mystical Body of Christ. How well suited to the needs of our times is this sublime concept is abundantly proved by the masterly exposition of the doctrine contained in the latest Encyclical of our Holy Father Pope Pius XII. (*Mystici Corporis Christi* of 1943.) When the world is torn to shreds by hatred, the voice of Pius XII is raised to remind men of their dignity as brothers of Christ and of each other, as sons of God the heavenly Father.

This lofty principle too, opens up immense fields for true zeal. I suppose that at least sometimes you find people trying. They get on your nerves; some mannerism of theirs irritates you and you explode with annoyance. Now the way to correct that is not so much to try to check it, – although of course you certainly must try to do that too. But all true reformation comes from within. What is wrong in your case is your attitude towards that person, who, in point of fact quite probably is a bore, or unreasonable, or exceedingly selfish. No amount of talk will convince you that he is anything else, nor are you expected to be blind to his glaring faults. Charity, says Saint Paul, is patient and kind, but he never said it was blind. But if through prayer and meditation you can train yourself to discern Christ behind that person who torments you; to see and realise that the queer fads contain an immense grace for your soul, that they are permitted by Our Lord to remain and give you a fine opportunity of laying up treasure in heaven, – if you can, through prayer and meditation, work your mind round to that point of view, most of your difficulty is going to solve itself. But, – it takes time!

Not only will you have patience but there will spring up in your heart a really sincere love for every man and woman upon whom your two eyes rest. You will always be looking, not merely at a human being, but at a being whose soul is God's Tabernacle. This engenders patience, reverence, genuine affection. How could it be otherwise? It prevents harshness, tale-bearing, throwing ridicule on another, censoriousness, cynicism, in a word anything that would deliberately cause pain. And once more how could it be otherwise? If I recognise the implications of the sublime doctrine of the Mystical Body and realise that what I say or think or do, is said or done to Jesus Christ, – how then can I fail to give to others a genuine love which will prove itself at every turn?

No wonder Our Lord gave this doctrine as the test par excellence of discipleship with Him. "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." No wonder that it forms the substance of much of Saint Paul's teaching. "Love is the fulfilling of the Law." And no wonder that a man or woman whose mind feeds habitually on this thought will be ready to face any toil or suffering for another. And what is such readiness but zeal?

To see Christ in others, no matter how effectively He may be disguised; To love Christ in others no matter how much they fail to express in themselves His lovable qualities. To reverence Christ in others, and adore Him present in their souls, even when they themselves think little of their dignity, nay more, when they drag it in the mud. To serve Christ in others when I see they are selfish and using me as a tool for their own ends. To pass over a slight and pretend not to see, to show special affection towards one who I know has ridiculed or detracted or calumniated me in my absence, to go out of my way to make much of somebody for whom nobody cares. To do these things because the love of Christ has seized upon my heart, and because I recognise Him in the souls of those around me, – this is the true zeal learned by Saul on the Damascus Road. This is the second principle – and by it and by it alone, may Catholics hope to win back the world to sanity and to Christ.

Finally, Our Lord told Saul: "It is hard for you to kick against the goad." As though He would say: "Saul, I am offering you so powerful a grace today, that, although it will leave you free, as grace always does, either to yield to Me or to persist in your own way, – still so strong is it, that to refuse is going to be exceedingly difficult."

There are times when a loving Christ appeals with more than usual insistence. There are special moments when He seems to beg us to make use of the graces He longs to pour into our souls. Such a moment came into Paul's life here on the Damascus Road.

Such a moment may well come for you or me when we are stretched upon a bed of sickness, when mission or retreat is preached in our parish, or when we stand brokenhearted over the mortal remains of one who was very dear to us, and, standing there we recognise the instability of everything that this poor world holds as precious.

At such moments, it is hard to kick against the goad. Hard, yes, but still it remains true that resistance is still possible. Divine grace will argue with us. It will plead with us. It will upbraid us with our infidelities and ingratitude. But force our will, – that is what grace will never do. God stands back always and manifests a deep respect for the gift of freewill, which He bestowed upon man. It may indeed be hard to reject such a mighty grace from the loving Christ, but resistance remains, none the less, a fearful possibility.

One day Our Lord sat upon the brow of a hill overlooking Jerusalem. He folded His hands upon His knees and turned a wistful gaze in the direction of the faithless city. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that

kill the prophets and stone them that are sent to you, how often would I have gathered together your children as the hen does gather her chickens under her wings, and you would not." He longed to redeem that city from its sin, but He waited for the city freely to accept Him. And He waited in vain and Jerusalem paid the terrible penalty of her rejection of Christ. "It is hard for you," – even Saul was free to continue on his course.

"It is hard for you to kick against the goad." There is still another way of interpreting these words. Our Lord by them reminds Saul that if he does resist he is going to be a very miserable man. "If you refuse this grace you will reap as a reward of your obstinacy nothing but sadness and unhappiness." And again, experience bears witness to the truth of that word. Look at this man enslaved by passion, groaning under a load of 'depression and self-contempt and remorse and shame. Happy is he? And to such as him the loving merciful Christ offers a grace to break his chains.

Such a joy comes back into that man's soul if he acts up to his conscience! There will probably be "hard" struggles but every victory brings him more courage and more assurance of ultimate victory. On the other hand, let him sell the pass and the instantaneous effect is despondency, a crushing conviction that his case is hopeless. Every priest knows that one of the most difficult foes to be met with after a serious lapse into sin is discouragement. "It is hard" indeed. Sin takes a big toll, even in this life, in the bitterness and unrest it leaves in its wake.

We know that Saul, in point of fact, did not "kick against the goad." He yielded on that momentous day, to the first promptings of grace within him. And, as the years went on, he learned more and more about this wonderful principle. Indeed, he has come to be called "the doctor of divine grace."

And what does this doctrine imply? First of all, it leads a man to understand with a clarity too penetrating for him to express, that of himself he has nothing of good. Hence, Paul asks his Corinthians: "What have you that you have not received? And if you have received it, why do you glory as if you had not received?" There is absolutely nothing good in any of us except what He has put into us. More than that, we cannot have even a single good desire, much less carry that good desire into effect, unless helped along all the way by divine grace.

Should we therefore lose heart? Not at all, for while on the one hand it is true that we are so useless and helpless, it is also an inspiring and comforting thought that through the grace of Christ we can vanquish every enemy. "I can do all things in Him that strengthens me," – There is, therefore, the complementary truth. In my utter weakness, I cannot stand, but the strong sustaining hands of my Christ are ready to support me.

I cannot keep away from that bad companion, – without Christ's grace. I cannot keep that pledge, – without Christ's grace. I cannot get out of bed on a Sunday morning and go to Mass, – unless He comes with His grace to enable me to do so. "Underneath are the ever-lasting arms."

But it is also true that I can command tremendous sources of strength, for all the infinite wealth of Christ's merits are there to supplement my poverty. It is true that we are reduced to pauperism except that a merciful generous Christ gives us abundant alms, and, so far from giving it grudgingly, He warns us to keep coming and to keep asking and He goes the length of assuring us that He never will turn us away.

Paul's zeal was maintained in the second place by his vivid grasp of the truth about Christ's Mystical Body, – "Why persecute you Me?... I am Jesus Whom you persecute"; and lastly it was built up on

the knowledge he had of the need and the power of divine grace, – "it is hard for you to kick against the goad.

With such an intellectual background directing my zeal I can understand why Paul teaches me that a whole-hearted service of God and an unqualified acceptance of the apostolate is, pre-eminently "a reasonable service".

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren; by the mercy of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service." Anything else is unreasonable. This is how Paul was schooled. His mind was convinced, his heart was set on fire. The result is that he stands before us as a man of God, an intrepid warrior, a lover only asking to be allowed prove the sincerity of his love.

(Thanks to the Irish Messenger.)

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