

An Immeasurable Love

THOMAS À KEMPIS

(ca. 1380–1471)

Loving God above all is at the heart of Thomas à Kempis's teaching in *The Imitation of Christ*.

Ah, Lord God, my holy Lover, when You come into my heart, all that is within me will rejoice. You are my glory and the exultation of my heart. You are my hope and refuge in the day of my tribulation. . . . Love often knows no limits but overflows all bounds. Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of troubles, attempts more than it is able, and does not plead impossibility, because it believes that it may and can do all things for its Beloved. . . .

This warm affection of soul is a loud voice crying in the ears of God, and it says: "My God, my love, You are all mine and I am all Yours. Give me an increase of love, that I may learn to taste with the inward lips of my heart how sweet it is to love, how sweet to be dissolved in love and bathe in it. Let me be rapt in love. Let me rise above self in great fervor and wonder. Let me sing the hymn of love, and let me follow You, my Love, to the heights. Let my soul exhaust itself in praising You, rejoicing out of love. Let me love You more than myself, and let me not love myself except for Your sake. In You let me love all those who truly love You, as the law of love, which shines forth from You, commands."

Adapted from Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, III, 5, at
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kempis/imitation.toc.html>.

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A JESUIT MINISTRY

Daily Kindnesses

SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE
(1651–1719)

The founder of the Christian Brothers urges us to be kind, especially to people we do not like. Adapt yourself with gracious and charitable compliance to all your neighbor's weaknesses. In particular, make a rule to hide your feelings in many inconsequential matters. Give up all bitterness toward your neighbor, no matter what. And be convinced that your neighbor is in everything better than you. This will not be difficult if you keep even a little aware of yourself. It will give you the ability to overcome your feelings of resentment.

Each day look for every possible opportunity to do a kindness for those you do not like. After examining yourself on this matter every morning, decide what you are going to do, and do it faithfully with kindness and humility.

Be sure to be warmly affable toward everyone. Speak to and answer everyone with very great gentleness and deference. Keep in mind the way the Lord spoke and replied to others even when he was most harshly treated. Never comment on the faults or the behavior of your neighbors. When others speak of them, put a good interpretation on their actions. If you cannot, say nothing at all.

In short, decide never to speak of the failings of others nor to reprimand them, no matter how serious they seem to you. When you see someone fall into some fault, call to mind the gospel saying, "You can see the splinter in your brother's eye, but you cannot see the beam in your own" (see Matthew 7:3).

The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle, trans. Colman Molloy
(Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1988), letter 105, p. 219.

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Mercy Unbounded

BLESSED FRANCIS XAVIER SEELOS
(1819–1867)

Many people came to conversion when they experienced God's unlimited mercy through the ministry of Father Francis Seelos, a Redemptorist priest who was famous as a compassionate confessor. Oh, if only all the sinners of the whole wide world were present here! Yes, even the greatest, the most hardened, even those close to despair. I would call out to them. "The Lord God is merciful and gracious, patient and of much compassion" (Exodus 34:6). I would show them why the Apostles call God the Father of Mercy, the God of all consolation. I would tell them that the prophet in the Old Testament even said that the earth is full of the mercy of God and that mercy is above all his works.

Oh how can I make this clear to you? First, that God is filled with pity and invites us lovingly to come to him? That God waits for the conversion of the whole world with patience? And thirdly, that God receives the repentant sinner with all love.

O Mary, Mother of Mercy! You understood the mercy of God when you cried out in the Magnificat: "His mercy is from generation to generation." Obtain for all sinners a childlike confidence in the mercy of God.

O, you sinners who have not the courage to confess your sins because they are so numerous or so grievous or so shameful! Oh, come without fear or trembling! I promise to receive you with all mildness. If I do not keep my word, I here publicly give you permission to throw it up to me in the confessional and to charge me with lying.

Francis Xavier Seelos. "Sermons," Redemptorist Archives, Baltimore Province, III, 21; pp. 22 and 230. Reprinted with permission of the Redemptorists of the Baltimore.

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Called to Daily Service

BLESSED JOHN HENRY NEWMAN
(1801–1890)

The great convert and cardinal taught that we meet Christ by faithfully performing the duties of our vocation, no matter how ordinary. When persons are convinced life is short . . . and that eternity is the only subject that really can claim or can fill our thoughts, then they are apt to undervalue this life altogether, and to forget its real importance.

They are apt to wish to spend the time of their sojourning here in a positive separation from active and social duties: yet it should be recollected that the employments of this world, though not themselves heavenly, are after all the way to heaven . . . but it is difficult to realize this. It is difficult to realize both truths at once, and to connect both truths together. . . . In various ways does the thought of the next world lead men to neglect their duty in this; and whenever it does so we may be sure that there is something wrong and unchristian, not in their thinking of the next world, but in their manner of thinking of it. . . .

The Christian will feel that the true contemplation of his Savior lies in his worldly business; that as Christ is seen in the poor, and in the persecuted, . . . so is he seen in the employments he puts upon his chosen . . . ; that in attending to his own calling he will be meeting Christ; that if he neglect it, he will not on that account enjoy his presence at all the more, but that while performing it, he will see Christ revealed to his soul amid the ordinary actions of the day, as by a sort of sacrament.

John Henry Newman, “Doing Glory to God in Pursuits of the World,” in Charles Davis, ed., *English Spiritual Writers* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), p. 145.
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Scripture—A Must Read

SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
(347–407)

St. John Chrysostom says that laypeople must read Scripture regularly because Bible study strengthens them to counter the temptations that they face in the world each day. I am always encouraging you to pay attention not only to what is said here in church, but also, when you are at home, to continue constantly in the practice of reading the divine Scriptures. . . . For let not anyone say to me those silly, contemptible words, . . . “Reading the Bible isn’t my thing. That’s for those . . . who have a way of life without interruptions.” What are you saying, man? It’s not your business to pay attention to the Bible because you are distracted by thousands of concerns? Then Bible reading belongs more to you than to the monks! For they do not make as much use of the help of the divine Scriptures as those who always have a great many things to do. . . .

But you are always standing in the line of battle and are constantly being hit, so you need more medicine. For not only does your spouse irritate you, but your son annoys you, . . . an enemy schemes against you, a friend envies you, a neighbor insults you, a colleague trips you up. . . . Numerous powerful inducements to anger and anxiety, to discouragement and grief, to vanity and loss of sense surround us on every side. . . .

Since many things of this kind besiege our soul, we need the divine medicines, so that we might treat the wounds we already have, and so that we might check beforehand the wounds that are not yet, but are going to be. . . . For it is not possible, not possible for anyone to be saved who does not constantly have the benefit of spiritual reading.

Sermon on Lazarus, trans. Kevin Perrotta. © Kevin Perrotta. Used by his permission.

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The Pattern for Community Life

SAINT PAUL
(First Century)

St. Paul taught that a Christian community is the Body of Christ, with each member contributing his or her gifts for the life of all. Just as each of us has various parts in one body, and the parts do not all have the same function: in the same way, all of us, though there are so many of us, make up one body in Christ, and as different parts we are all joined to one another.

Then since the gifts that we have differ according to the grace that was given to each of us: if it is a gift of prophecy, we should prophesy as much as our faith tells us; if it is a gift of practical service, let us devote ourselves to serving; if it is teaching, to teaching if it is encouraging, to encouraging. When you give, you should give generously from the heart; if you are put in charge, you must be conscientious; if you do works of mercy, let it be because you enjoy doing them. Let love be without any pretence. Avoid what is evil; stick to what is good.

In brotherly love let your feelings of deep affection for one another come to expression and regard others as more important than yourself. In the service of the Lord, work not halfheartedly but with conscientiousness and an eager spirit. Be joyful in hope, persevere in hardship; keep praying regularly; share with any of God's holy people who are in need; look for opportunities to be hospitable.

Romans 12:4–13 Excerpt from *The New Jerusalem Bible*, copyright © 1985 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd. and Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.
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Giving Respect to the Poor

BLESSED FRÉDÉRIC OZANAM

(1813–1853)

We should care for the poor in a way that honors them, so that they can reciprocate our gifts. Help is humiliating when it appeals to men from below, taking heed only of their material wants. It humiliates when there is no reciprocity. When you give a poor man nothing but bread or clothes, there is no likelihood of his ever giving you anything in return. But help honors when it appeals to him from above. It respects him when it deals with his soul, with his religious, moral and political education, and with all that emancipates him from his passions. Help honors when, to the bread that nourishes, it adds the visit that consoles, advice that enlightens, the friendly handshake that lifts up flagging courage.

It esteems the poor man when it treats him with respect, not only as an equal, but as a superior, since he is suffering what perhaps we are incapable of suffering. After all, he is the messenger of God to us, sent to prove our justice and our charity, and to save us by our works. Help then becomes honorable, because it may become mutual. Every person who gives a kind word, good advice, a consolation today, may tomorrow need a kind word, advice, or consolation. The hand that you clasp clasps yours in return. That indigent family whom you love loves you in return, and will have largely acquitted themselves towards you when they shall have prayed for you.

Adapted from an Oct. 21, 1848, article in Ozanam's newspaper, *New Era*, reprinted in *Frédéric Ozanam: His Life and Works*, by Kathleen O'Meara (New York: Christian Press Association Publishing Company, 1891).

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Show and Tell

POPE PAUL VI
(1897–1978)

Our evangelization must involve more than setting a good example. We must speak to others about the good news and share our testimony. Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who show they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization. . . .

Nevertheless . . . even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified—what Peter called always having “your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have” (see 1 Peter 3:15)—and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed.

Pope Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Nuntiandi*
(*On Evangelization in the Modern World*), 21 and 22, at <http://www.vatican.va>.
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Look Ahead

ST. FRANCES XAVIER CABRINI
(1850–1917)

In 1885 St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, founder of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, gave the following advice in a letter to one of her sisters: Why, dearest daughter, do you waste time in sadness when time is so precious for the salvation of poor sinners? Get rid of your melancholy immediately. Don't think any more about yourself. Do not indulge in so many useless and dangerous reflections. Look ahead always without ever looking back. Keep your gaze fixed on the summit of perfection where Christ awaits you.

He wants you despoiled of all things, intent only on procuring his greater glory during this brief time of your existence. For the short time that remains, is it worthwhile to lose yourself in melancholy like those who think only of themselves as if all were to end with this life? Ah, no. We must not even desire that our pilgrimage on this earth be a short one because we do not yet know the infinite value of every minute employed for the glory of God. Carry your cross then but carry it joyfully, my daughter. Think that Jesus loves you very much. And in return for such love, don't lose yourself in so many desires, but accept daily with serenity whatever comes your way. May the heart of Jesus bless you and make you holy not as you want but as he desires.

Letters of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, trans. Ursula Infante
(Milan: Ancora, 1970), pp. 24–25.

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Holiness for All

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES
(1567–1622)

In his Introduction to the Devout Life, St. Francis de Sales showed how ordinary people, who are locked daily into worldly routines, could live saintly lives. He addressed his reader as Philothea, a soul who loves God: Very often people who live an ordinary life are apt to refuse any attempt to lead a devout life, claiming that it is impossible. Just as no animal presumes to eat of the plant commonly called Palma Christi [castor oil plant], they imagine that anyone who is immersed in the flow of mundane affairs ought not presume to seek the palm of Christian piety.

So I have shown them that, just as the mother-of-pearl fish lives in the sea without ever absorbing one drop of salt water, a true steadfast soul may live in the world untainted by its influence. . . . No indeed, Philothea, true devotion hinders nothing, but on the contrary it perfects everything. When it runs counter to anyone's rightful vocation, you may be sure it is spurious. Aristotle says that the bee sucks honey from flowers without damaging them, leaving them as whole and fresh as it found them. But true devotion does better still. For it not only does not hinder a vocation, but on the contrary adorns and beautifies it. Throw precious stones into honey, and each will grow more brilliant according to its color. Similarly, everyone fulfils his special calling better when subject to the influence of devotion. Where that is the guide, family duties are lighter, married love truer, service to the King more faithful, and every kind of occupation more acceptable and better performed.

Adapted from St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Preface and III,
at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/desales/devout_life.toc.html.

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