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PUBLISHER’S NOTE: Clarence J. Enzler was the author of many Catholic books and booklets, including *My Other Self* (1957) and *Everyone’s Way of the Cross* (1970). His nine-part series of Lenten reflections, published under the title “Heroism and Holiness,” first appeared in the *Ave Maria* magazine in February, March, and April of 1963.

Lenten Reflections

Five: God Speaks to Us in the Present Moment

BY CLARENCE J. ENZLER

The ideal of being completely what we are in the best possible way seems obvious, simple and perfectly natural. But how is it applied in practice? Undoubtedly, holiness consists in faithfully following God’s plan for us as unique persons, each of us being the person He wishes. But how do we know His plan for us? How do we know the precise person He desires us to be?

Well, we don’t know, of course, the precise person God wants us to be ten, five, or even two years from now. We don’t know His precise plan for us even two minutes from now.

We are like the little boy whom the pastor asked, “Who made you?”

“God.”

“What did God make you to be?”

“I dunno. I ain’t done yet.”

We know God’s general plan: holiness, sanctity, putting on Christ. We know that we are to carry out this plan by fidelity to His Commandments and the precepts of the Church, and by fulfilling the duties of our particular state and circumstances of life.

But is this all we have to go on? Certainly not. While we cannot know God’s precise plan for us two minutes hence, we can know,

down to the minutest detail, His plan for us at *this* moment. We can know exactly the kind of person He wants us to be here and now.

We can know this because God speaks to us at every instant—speaks to us through all that He permits to happen to us, to touch us, at this and every moment. Nothing happens without His knowledge and His permission. The whole of holiness consists in recognizing God in every circumstance of the present moment and conforming our will to His will as this moment reveals it. At every occurrence, writes Father Jean-Pierre de Caussade, “we should say: *Dominus est*. It is the Lord.”

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Everyone’s Way of the Cross

Clarence Enzler’s perennially popular *Everyone’s Way of the Cross* was first published by Ave Maria Press in 1970 and has since gone on to sell over 3.6 million copies, in both a [regular](#) and a [large print](#) edition. Ideal for either private devotion or public Stations of the Cross, Enzler’s meditation booklet urges us to carry on Christ’s “unfinished business” and unite our will with His.

This is the essence of the life of every saint who ever lived. They expressed it in their own terms, but the core is always a recognition of and a union of will with the designs of God at each present moment.

St. Paul expressed it as praying without ceasing; St. Francis of Assisi in his concept of the brotherhood of all creation, “Brother Fire,” “Lady Poverty” and Sister Death”; St. Francis de Sales in his famous dictum, “desire nothing, refuse nothing”; St. Thérèse in her “little way.”

The classic development of this doctrine, that each moment is the manifestation of the will of God, is that of the Jesuit Father Caussade, who lived more than two centuries ago. “Things indeed proceed like words out of the mouth of God,” he wrote in *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence*. “God creates at each moment a divine thought which is signified by a created thing.... What happens at each moment bears the imprint of the will of God and of His adorable name.”

Holiness, therefore, “corresponds to the love we have for God’s good pleasure,” by which Father Caussade means God’s designs, will, or action of the present moment. “The more His will and designs are loved, no matter what they may ordain, the greater is the sanctity.”

Here, then, is the difference between ordinary holiness and heroic holiness. The faithful observance of the Commandments and the fulfillment of the duties of our state of life make us holy. But adding to this the loving acceptance of God’s designs as they are revealed moment by moment, and the loving submission to the crosses that are constantly being presented to us—this makes us heroically holy.

Permitting God to lead us moment by moment, recognizing with the loving faith that whatever happens to us each moment by His design is *best*, “bearing the present moment as if there were nothing else in the world to expect,” this is what makes the

difference. And this is why the highest perfection is possible for the lay person as well as for the monk or the nun, for the laborer as for the chairman of the board, for the charwoman as for the President of the United States, for the illiterate peasant as for the Pope.

It was the realization of this truth that led Caussade to say with undisguised fervor, “O my God, how I should wish to be the missionary of Your holy will and teach everyone that there is nothing so easy, so ordinary and so ready to everyone’s hand as holiness.... Do what you are now doing, suffer what you are now suffering; to do all this with holiness, nothing need be changed but your hearts... sanctity therefore consists in willing what happens to us by God’s design. Yes, holiness of heart is a simple *fiat*, a simple conformity of the will to God’s will.”

The doctrine assuredly is true. Moreover, it is so easily understood that we are likely to assume that it is equally easy to practice, just as we sometimes assume that St. Thérèse proposed nothing very difficult in her “little way.” Actually, the sweet exterior of the Little Flower concealed a will of iron, and it was thoroughly tested in her faithfulness to the practice of her little sacrifices. So, too, Father Caussade. On one occasion he was ordered by his superior to take on a task for which he had a great distaste and, as he thought, no aptitude. He confesses that he groaned, prayed, and offered to spend the rest of his life in the novitiate house at Toulouse, if only he could be relieved of this assignment.

If it is a relief to us to find that others even of the stature of this good priest discover a heavy cross in obedience, it is even more an encouragement to learn that after Father Caussade, again and again, *willed* to make the sacrifice, he embarked on his new assignment with “peace and liberty of spirit,” and more than this remained “calm and in peace” in the midst of a multitude of

problems and complications which normally would have overwhelmed him.

So, while the practice is one which requires heroic perseverance, good will and prayer provide all that is necessary.

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Still it is apparent that while there are many who say, “Lord, I accept without reservation whatever You permit to befall me,” few actually are as good as their word. If we are to practice what we promise we must strive to acquire a deep faith that God truly has planned the circumstances of our entire life, in every detail no matter how insignificant.

The sorrows, disappointments, frustrations of our daily routine are not the result of blind chance. The monotony of our work, the drudgery of our household duties; this employer whose orders are so brusquely delivered, this superior whose criticism is so biting; this neighbor who gets in our way with misguided kindness, or that one who always seems to intrude on our privacy when we particularly want to be alone; all these are means whereby we may practice self-abandonment to God’s will of the present moment.

Our headaches, backaches, toothaches; our fatigue, irritability, moodiness; our temptations, anxieties, fears; the insults, slights, ridicule, we may have to endure—all these are means of grace.

The loving acceptance of just such little crosses which are constantly being offered us, and which seem to us of no importance whatsoever to the spiritual life, are the essence of heroic holiness.

These very crosses provided by our daily routine are the sure and short road to sanctity, “a far surer and shorter road than extraordinary states and actions,” says Father Caussade. What we consider not only worthless but even a hindrance to holiness is

the very means which God is giving us moment by moment to make us His heroes and heroines.

But is not only our sorrows, pains and frustrations which take us close to God. Why is it that we always think of “fiat” in terms of crosses? When the Blessed Mother uttered her fiat, it was in acceptance of the great *joy* of her life—of her becoming the Mother of the Most High.

Somehow, we seem to regard our joys as something we have earned or as something that automatically comes to us in the natural order of living. Only our sorrows, our crosses, especially the big and painful ones, come from God.

It must make the angels sad to see us deny God the fiat we owe Him for the joys He sends. Surely, He wants us to recognize these as His gifts, too.

It is a beautiful day—fiat, and thank You, Lord.

My work goes well—fiat, and thank You.

Our children have received an honor—fiat.

We are thrilled by the joys of marriage—fiat.

Our laughter at a joke, pleasure at a movie, relaxation in a game, enjoyment of delicious food—these, too, are to be accepted, willed as coming from His hands, part of God’s moment by moment plan for our perfection.

To acquire such an awareness that God speaks to us in all that He permits to occur, it is necessary for us to meditate on this truth and from time to time during the day call to mind such thoughts as these: This moment is given me by God to show my love by uniting my will with His. Lord, not only do I accept this moment with its exact and most minute circumstances, I *will* it because it is Your will.

Doing this is a source of spiritual peace. If all the circumstances of this moment are God speaking to us, then they must be good, for surely God’s will must always accomplish

what is best for us if we permit Him to act. If we trust God enough to make His will ours at each moment, we can afford to be gentle, unhurried, untroubled, serene. No longer does the universe need our hand on the throttle; God is on the job. No longer do we need to fret about what is ahead of us tomorrow or next year; we can afford to leave the future to God.

This carries over, of course, into our work. We do not have to be afraid to fail. When we have done what we honestly feel is our reasonable best, we can abandon the success of our efforts to Him. Unlike some worldly employers, God never insists on success—only on care and diligence in doing our part.

To quote Father Caussade again: “Often things go all right and I give thanks to God; sometimes everything goes wrong, I again bless His Holy Name and offer Him the sacrifice of my efforts. Once this sacrifice has been made, God arranges everything.”

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True, it does happen at times that we have more to do than we can accomplish in the period provided. In this situation, all we can do is our best. And our best almost invariably is done when we work calmly and diligently, rather than in feverish haste. While we are doing one thing, that is enough; we cannot do all our tasks at the same time. So we work calmly but not anxiously, steadily but not feverishly, taking each task as it comes, doing them one at a time. If despite our best efforts, we do not finish or succeed and a reprimand follows, there should be no disquiet in what St. Francis de Sales calls the “higher” part of our soul, even though we may feel a natural disappointment.

This cross, too, is one that God permits us to bear; and if we bear it with loving acceptance He *must* make of it not only what is good for us but what is best—so that this

becomes the best that could happen to us as of that moment in God’s total plan.

This virtue called by many different names—self-abandonment, self-renunciation, holy indifference, conformity to the will of God, the Little Way—is the means whereby we make ourselves the unique persons God wishes us to be at any given moment. This is being completely what we are in the best possible way. This, says St. Francis de Sales in his *Spiritual Conferences*, “is the virtue of virtues; it is the cream of charity, the odor of humility, the merit, I consider, of patience, and the fruit of perseverance. Great is this virtue, and alone worthy of being practiced by the best beloved children of God.”

True, it requires great faith, great trust, and great love. But no sooner do we place ourselves completely in God’s hands than He provides an answer to every question, a remedy to every ailment, and a solace for every cross.

This is not to say that “we shall never have desires contrary to the will of God or that nature will never shrink with repugnance from the dispositions of His good pleasure,” St. Francis continues. But when this occurs “we must remain at peace, and paying no attention whatever to what that lower nature desires, we must embrace the divine will and unite ourselves to it whatever this may entail.”

In the last farewell which Francis spoke to the Sisters of Lyons the evening before he died, the great Bishop of Geneva left this message that is so clearly applicable to our day and our America:

“Do you ask what I desire should remain most deeply engraved upon your mind, so that you may put it to practice? Ah, my dear daughters, what shall I say, except these excellent words I have so often already recommended to you: Desire nothing, refuse nothing. These words say everything, for they teach us the practice of perfect indifference. Look upon the Infant Jesus in the Crib [this was the day after Christmas]; He accepts

poverty, nakedness, the company of brute beasts, all the inclemencies of the weather—all, in fact, that happens to Him by His Father's permission. We are never told that He stretched forth His little hands to His Mother's breast; He left her to provide all that was necessary to Him, but, at the same time, He never refused the little comforts which

she gave Him. He received the services of St. Joseph, the adoration of the kings and of the shepherds, all with equal indifference. So, too, ought we to desire nothing and to refuse nothing, but to suffer and to receive with perfect evenness of mind all that the Providence of God may permit. May God give us grace to do this.”

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