

Duquesne University

Duquesne Scholarship Collection

A Spiritan Anthology

Anthologie Spiritaine

1-1-2011

08. Apostolic life, character and prayer

Christian de Mare CSSp

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/anthologie-spiritaine-english>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Repository Citation

de Mare, C. (2011). 08. Apostolic life, character and prayer. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/anthologie-spiritaine-english/47>

This Chapter II is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthologie Spiritaine at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in A Spiritan Anthology by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

Apostolic life, character and prayer

To Fr. Marcellin Collin¹

Marcellin Collin² was a member from the very beginning, since he was present at the inaugural Mass of the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary on September 25th, 1841 at Notre Dames des Victories. He was a missionary in Reunion, working with Fr. Le Vavas seur. Libermann gives him advice on how to master his difficult character; he also describes a simple form of prayer for people who are busily engaged in the apostolic life.

January 29th, 1845

Dear Confrere,

I received your letter of May 1st some time ago and I was greatly moved by it.

Here is a piece of general advice for you: always live at peace with your enemies. Let me explain what I mean. You have a difficult character and it brings you much suffering. But do not feel that you have to get rid of it at all costs; it is God's will that you should learn to live with it, even if you do look on it as an enemy. So accept the will of God with patience and gentleness, and refuse to give in to feelings of sadness and disappointment. When your temperament starts to get the better of you, humble yourself, recover your peace of mind and forget all about it. These feelings of uncompromising severity are not as wicked as you imagine. They come from the temperament you were born with, so it is not really your fault. It starts to push you in a certain direction before your

¹ N.D. VII, pp. 34-39

² See Index

own will is in any way involved. Once you get worked up like this, you need time to recover your balance and all attempts to recover it by force will be useless. So at such times, remain humbly submissive to the will of God, for it is God who allows you to undergo this trial. If you do this, peacefully, trusting in the goodness of Jesus, you can be absolutely certain that he will be pleased with you.

I was very flattered when you compared me to the Lord in your letter! But it is quite true that when you came to me each week (in the novitiate) to tell me about the faults you had committed through your weakness, I felt great sympathy for you and was not in the least shocked by what you had to say; I could see that your recognition of these frailties had encouraged you to give yourself all the more generously into the hands of God. And his reply is to love you even more than before, if such a thing were possible.

Our Lord knows very well how weak you are, but rest assured that he does not love you any the less because of it. So avoid getting upset; you are not making him sad...or at least, far less frequently, because most of the time, your will has no part in it. If it does play a part, it is usually because it is taken by surprise.

So what can you do? You have been born with a difficult character, so live in peace and humbly submit to the will of God. You say you want to belong to God. Well, you already belong to him and you will become increasingly attached as time goes by. Be brave and sacrifice yourself for his greater glory.

Do not complain about your lot. The imperfection of your nature is compensated by many other blessings and graces of which you are largely unaware. The defects of your temperament will help to keep you poor and humble at the feet

of Jesus, so in a way, they are a bit like the fertilizer we put on plants to produce more growth!

You are wrong to think that your remorse is a punishment from God. He does not act that way - he loves you far too much for that. The very harshness of your self-reproach shows that it is coming from your own nature, so simply ignore these guilt-feelings. You can hold me responsible for any harm that results from following this advice. Do not mistake the voice of the wolf for that of the lamb: rest assured that those feelings of guilt do not come from the Holy Spirit.

Those interior voices of remorse are coming from your own faulty temperament. They do not help you to be courageous and you will hardly ever be able to follow what they suggest. Such thoughts do not lead to God. They make you too concerned with yourself and excite your imagination, whereas the voice of God is always gentle and peaceful. It gives you the courage to do what he wants of you and directs your whole being towards him.

You are wrong when you say that your present state is a punishment from God. Just be happy that you belong to him and you are sacrificing yourself for his sake. But remain always at peace. I have told you so often that Our Lord himself must be the director of your soul; this is true not just for yourself but for everybody who is involved in the apostolate.

Nevertheless, consult Fr. Le Vavas seur (*his superior*) regarding your interior life. Do not do this to seek consolation, but sacrifice yourself to the Lord. Consult him so as to avoid acting presumptuously and to preserve your simplicity.

To return to what I was saying a moment ago, do not talk about "*breaking your character*" or "*crushing the rigidity of your character*". We cannot break iron; we soften it in a fire so that it becomes pliable. The line of conduct I traced for you above is the only one to follow; it will soften your severity to the

extent that the good Lord desires it. Do not be in too much of a hurry to get rid of this fault; if you concentrate too much on that, it would do more harm than good. You would run the risk of losing your interior peace, humility and trustful submission to the will of God.

Be patient with your chains. When you are alone with Our Lord, let there be no feelings of remorse. Turn your mind away from your faults and give yourself totally to him with confidence and peace. Those reproaches spring from your own particular character, sometimes even from self-love. Throw them away and speak trustfully to Our Lord, instead of speaking harshly and anxiously to yourself. If you were called to give an account of yourself at this very moment, your condition would be far better than you imagine. Your imperfections are not voluntary and they are being constantly purified by grace.

Regarding purity of intention, I have only a few words to say. Things like self-love, self-interest and complacency are enemies that are best overcome by despising them. The more you worry about them, the more trouble they will be. They will only die when you die, so put up with them in peace and humility and treat them with scorn and indifference. They will gradually diminish and finally disappear - almost entirely, but not completely.

Prayer is of the greatest importance and yet it is something simple, so adopt a method as uncomplicated as possible. There is no need for too much meditation; you do not have to follow the method of Saint Sulpice in every detail. Your prayer should be a simple, calm and trusting repose in the presence of the Lord - that is all. Do not bother with too many meditations, hoping to produce holy feelings. Nothing you do during prayer should be forced; remain with Jesus like a poor child with its father. No need to put your feelings into words,

nor to express your needs to him, but rest with him in your poverty and weakness, ready to do whatever he wants.

When you are with the Lord, look upon yourself as somebody who belongs totally to him, leaving him to do with you whatever he wishes. This should be done without effort and without many words, either internal or external. Try to make this an habitual attitude of your soul, remaining constantly in his presence during personal prayer, isolated from everything else. Cast a glance towards him from time to time and when distractions come, try to dismiss them gently and without any anxiety. During the course of the day, you can do likewise.

In seeking contact with Jesus, allow him to direct you. It is not for you to tell him what to do! Do not formulate plans for him to follow nor imagine that things should happen this way or that. Just be happy to be with him and at his disposal and abandon yourself to his guidance, like a blind man who needs leading. Do not even try to talk to him too much, or expect to hear him speak to you; be at his disposal, placing all your trust in him alone.

Continue to act towards your superior as you have been doing, and do not be afraid. I will not listen to everything he has to say in his quest to cease being the superior. I know him as well as you do. Perhaps it is because of the difficulties between you and him that he wants to be discharged of his duties. Hē did not say so himself, but it might be the case. Do all you can to encourage him by seeing that peace reigns in the community.

Father Blanpin is a very simple and very good child of God; it is your character that is the source of the trouble. But do not worry about it because it will not last. Reduce your relations with him as far as possible, but do not give the impression that you are trying to avoid him. Be kind to him, for a good and fervent person suffers greatly from this kind of opposition. This

is a time of temptation for him, but it will pass. I will let Fr. Le Vavasseau know about your observations.

I did not mean to take so long to reply to your letter. I received it about five weeks ago, but for the last month, I have been suffering from a headache and distaste for any kind of food. It was caused first of all by the coal I was burning in my bedroom and then by the cold which affected my head. I have now completely recovered, but while I was ill I neglected everything because I was incapable of doing any serious work.

Please write to me frequently.

Yours in the love of the Holy Heart of Mary,

*F. Libermann,
Priest of the Holy Heart of Mary*