

## (2.9) Wanting Consolation

It is not hard to forego all human consolation when we are graced with the divine. But it is a notable thing, yes, it is exceptional, to be able to forego all comfort, both human and divine, and to be willing to bear this heart's exile for God's honor, and seek oneself in nothing, nor regards one's own desires.

Is it virtuous if you be cheerful and devout when grace comes? This experience is desired by all men and life is on a level path when supported by the grace of God. And what wonder is it if he feels no burden when he is borne up by the Almighty, and led by the Sovereign Guide?

We love to have something which comforts us, and it is hard to divest ourselves of self-love. The holy martyr Laurence, with his priest, overcame the world, because he despised whatever seemed delightful in this world. And, for the love of Christ, he even suffered God's high priest, Sixtus, whom he loved exceedingly, to be taken away from him. So he overcame the love of man by the love of the Creator, and instead of human consolation he accepted God's will. Even so must you learn to part with an intimate and beloved friend for the love of God. Take it not to heart when you lose a friend, knowing that at the last we must all be parted from one another.

A man will have a great and long struggle with himself before he learns to master self and turn his whole affection towards God. *Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (James 5:10).* When a man relies on himself, he easily turns to human consolations. But a true lover of Christ, and a diligent pursuer of virtue, does not fall back on human consolation, nor seek such sensible comfort; he patiently endures tough trials and willingly undergoes severe struggles for Christ.

Therefore when God gives spiritual consolation, receive it with thanksgiving, but know that it is God's gift, and not any merit of your own. Be not puffed up, nor overjoyed, nor vainly presumptuous, but rather be the more humble for the gift, more cautious too and fearful in all your actions, for that hour will pass away and temptation will follow. When consolation shall be taken away from you, do not presently despair but with patience and humility await the heavenly visitation for God is able to again to give you more abundant consolation. This is nothing new or strange to those who have experience in God's ways for among the great Saints and Prophets there was often this kind of alternation.

The psalmist (Psalm 30:7-13) recognizes his dependence on God as his thinking changes direction, first noting that *he will never be shaken as he stood like a mighty mountain when shown God's favor*, but then terrified when suddenly God was not there. It is then *he turned to God, pleading for mercy and asking God to be his helper*. At length he received the answer to his prayer and testifies that *his mourning is changed to joy, and he will be forever grateful*.

It has been thus with great Saints, hence, we that are weak and poor must not be discouraged if we are sometimes fervent, sometimes cold, for the spirit comes and goes according to His will: *The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of*



*the Spirit. (John3:8) . Whereas as holy Job says, You observe them every morning and try them at every moment. (Job7:18)*

Wherein then can I hope, or in what must I place my trust, but in God's mercy alone, and in the sole hope of heavenly grace? For whether I have by me good men or devout brothers, or faithful friends, or holy books, or beautiful treatises, or sweet canticles or hymns; all these help but little, and have but little savor, when I am forsaken by grace and left in my own poverty. At such times there is no better remedy than patience and self-denial, in full accordance with the will of God.

I have never found anyone so religious and devout as not sometimes to experience a withdrawal of grace, or feel a lessening of fervor. *Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord (John5:10).* No Saint was ever so sublimely rapt or illuminated as not to be tempted sooner or later. For he is not worthy of the sublime contemplation of God, who has not for God's sake been encumbered with some tribulation. And when temptation is encountered, it is usually a sign that consolation will follow. For heavenly comfort is promised to such as have been proved by temptation. The Lord says to him, *I will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in the garden of God. (Rev2:7)*

Now divine consolation is given that a man may bear adversities more resolutely, and temptation follows lest he grow proud for the good gift. The devil sleeps not, neither is the flesh yet dead; therefore you must not cease to prepare yourself for the battle, for on the right hand and on the left are enemies that never rest. *Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour. (1Peter 5:8)*

This article is based on Book 2, Chapter 9 of Thomas of Kempis' writing, "Imitation of Christ." It is not a translation, and there are many of those, but a personal reflection on his writing; if any of it helps give credit to Thomas of Kempis; if any of it fails the responsibility is mine. ( rfm)

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