

ABANDONMENT TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE

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CHAPTER ONE

Sanctity Consists in Fidelity to the Order Established by God, and in Submission to All His Operations

I. The Hidden Operations of God

Fidelity to the order established by God comprehended the whole sanctity of the righteous under the old law, even that of St. Joseph and of Mary herself.

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God continues to speak today as he spoke in former times to our fathers when there were no directors as at present, nor any regular method of direction. Then all spirituality was comprised in fidelity to the designs of God, for there was no regular system of guidance in the spiritual life to explain it in detail, nor so many instructions, precepts, and examples as there are now. Doubtless our present difficulties render this necessary, but it was not so in the first ages when souls were more simple and straightforward. Then, for those who led a spiritual life, each moment brought some duty to be faithfully accomplished. Their whole attention was thus concentrated consecutively like a hand that marks the hours which, at each moment, traverses the

space allotted to it. Their minds, incessantly animated by the impulsion of divine grace, turned imperceptibly to each new duty that presented itself by the permission of God at different hours of the day. Such were the hidden springs by which the conduct of Mary was actuated. Mary was the most simple of all creatures and the most closely united to God. Her answer to the angel when she said, "*Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*," contained all the mystic theology of her ancestors to whom everything was reduced, as it is now, to the purest, simplest submission of the soul to the will of God, under whatever form it presents itself. This beautiful and exalted state, which was the basis of the spiritual life of Mary, shines conspicuously in these simple words, "*Fiat mihi*" (Lk 1:38). Take notice that they are in complete harmony with those which our Lord desires that we should have always on our lips and in our hearts: "*Fiat voluntas tua*." It is true that what was required of Mary at this great moment was for her very great glory, but the magnificence of this glory would have made no impression on her if she had not seen in it the fulfillment of the will of God. In all things was she ruled by the divine will. Were her occupations ordinary, or of an elevated nature, they were to her but the manifestation, sometimes obscure, sometimes clear, of the operations of the most High, in which she found alike subject matter for the glory of God. Her spirit, transported with joy, looked upon all that she had to do or to suffer at each moment as the gift of him who fills with good things the hearts of

those who hunger and thirst for him alone, and have no desire for created things.

II. Ordinary Duties and Humility

The duties of each moment are the shadows beneath which hides the divine operation.

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“The power of the most High shall overshadow thee” (Lk 1:35), said the angel to Mary. This shadow, beneath which is hidden the power of God for the purpose of bringing forth Jesus Christ in the soul, is the duty, the attraction, or the cross that is presented to us at each moment. These are, in fact, but shadows like those in the order of nature, which, like a veil, cover sensible objects and hide them from us. Therefore, in the moral and supernatural order, the duties of each moment conceal, under the semblance of dark shadows, the truth of their divine character, which alone should rivet the attention. It was in this light that Mary beheld them. Also these shadows diffused over her faculties, far from creating illusion, did but increase her faith in him who is unchanging and unchangeable. The archangel may depart. He has delivered his message, and his moment has passed. Mary advances without ceasing and is already far beyond him. The Holy Spirit, who comes to take possession of her under the shadow of the angel’s words, will never abandon her.

There are remarkably few extraordinary characteristics in the outward events of the life of the most holy

Virgin, at least there are none recorded in holy Scripture. Her exterior life is represented as very ordinary and simple. She did and suffered the same things that anyone in a similar state of life might do or suffer. She went to visit her cousin Elizabeth as her other relatives did. She took shelter in a stable in consequence of her poverty. She returned to Nazareth from whence she had been driven by the persecution of Herod, and lived there with Jesus and Joseph, where they supported themselves by the work of their hands. It was in this way that the holy family gained their daily bread. But what a divine nourishment Mary and Joseph received from this daily bread for the strengthening of their faith! It is like a sacrament to sanctify all their moments. What treasures of grace lie concealed in these moments filled, apparently, by the most ordinary events. That which is visible might happen to anyone, but the invisible, discerned by faith, is no less than God operating very great things. O Bread of Angels! Heavenly manna! Pearl of the Gospel! Sacrament of the present moment! Thou givest God under as lowly a form as the manger, the hay, or the straw. And to whom dost thou give him? "*Esurientes implevit bonis*" (Lk 1:53). God reveals himself to the humble under the most lowly forms, but the proud, attaching themselves entirely to that which is extrinsic, do not discover him hidden beneath and are sent empty away.

III. The Work of Our Sanctification

How much more easily sanctity appears when regarded from this point of view.

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If the work of our sanctification presents, apparently, the most insurmountable difficulties, it is because we do not know how to form a just idea of it. In reality sanctity can be reduced to one single practice, fidelity to the duties appointed by God. Now this fidelity is equally within each one's power, whether in its active practice or passive exercise.

The active practice of fidelity consists in accomplishing the duties that devolve upon us whether imposed by the general laws of God and of the Church, or by the particular state that we may have embraced. Its passive exercise consists in the loving acceptance of all that God sends us at each moment.

Are either of these practices of sanctity above our strength? Certainly not the active fidelity, since the duties it imposes cease to be duties when we have no longer the power to fulfill them. If the state of your health does not permit you to go to Mass, you are not obliged to go. The same rule holds good for all the precepts laid down; that is to say for all those which prescribe certain duties. Only those which forbid things evil in themselves are absolute because it is never allowable to commit sin. Can there, then, be anything more reasonable? What excuse can be made? Yet this is all that God requires of the soul for the work of its sanctification. He exacts it from both high and low, from the strong and the weak, in a word from all, always and everywhere. It is true

then that he requires on our part only simple and easy things, since it is only necessary to employ this simple method to attain to an eminent degree of sanctity. If, over and above the Commandments, he shows us the counsels as a more perfect aim, he always takes care to suit the practice of them to our position and character. He bestows on us, as the principal sign of our vocation to follow them, the attractions of grace, which make them easy. He never impels anyone beyond his strength, nor in any way beyond his aptitude. Again, what could be more just? All you who strive after perfection and who are tempted to discouragement at the remembrance of what you have read in the lives of the saints and of what certain pious books prescribe; O you who are appalled by the terrible ideas of perfection that you have formed for yourselves; it is for your consolation that God has willed me to write this. Learn that of which you seem to be ignorant. This God of all goodness has made those things easy which are common and necessary in the order of nature, such as breathing, eating, and sleeping. No less necessary in the supernatural order are love and fidelity, therefore it must needs be that the difficulty of acquiring them is by no means so great as is generally represented. Review your life. Is it not composed of innumerable actions of very little importance? Well, God is quite satisfied with these. They are the share that the soul must take in the work of its perfection. This is so clearly explained in holy Scripture that there can be no doubt about it: "Fear God and keep the commandments, this is the whole duty of man" (Eccles 12:13), that is to say—this is all that is required on the part of man, and

it is in this that active fidelity consists. If man fulfills his part, God will do the rest. Grace being bestowed only on this condition, the marvels it effects are beyond the comprehension of man. For neither ear has heard nor eye seen, nor has it entered the mind what things God has planned in his omniscience, determined in his will, and carried out by his power in the souls given up entirely to him. The passive part of sanctity is still more easy since it only consists in accepting that which we very often have no power to prevent, and in suffering lovingly, that is to say with sweetness and consolation, those things that too often cause weariness and disgust. Once more I repeat, in this consists sanctity. This is the grain of mustard seed, which is the smallest of all the seeds, the fruits of which can neither be recognized nor gathered. It is the drachma of the Gospel, the treasure that none discover because they suppose it to be too far away to be sought. Do not ask me how this treasure can be found. It is no secret. The treasure is everywhere—it is offered to us at all times and wherever we may be. All creatures, both friends and enemies, pour it out with prodigality, and it flows like a fountain through every faculty of body and soul even to the very center of our hearts. If we open our mouths, they will be filled. The divine activity permeates the whole universe, it pervades every creature; wherever they are it is there; it goes before them, with them, and it follows them; all they have to do is to let the waves bear them on.

Would to God that kings and their ministers, princes of the Church and of the world, priests and soldiers, the peasantry and laborers, in a word, all men could

know how very easy it would be for them to arrive at a high degree of sanctity. They would only have to fulfill the simple duties of Christianity and of their state of life, to embrace with submission the crosses belonging to that state, and to submit with faith and love to the designs of Providence in all those things that have to be done or suffered without going out of their way to seek occasions for themselves. This is the Spirit by which the patriarchs and prophets were animated and sanctified before there were so many systems or so many masters of the spiritual life.¹ This is the spirituality of all ages and of every state. No state of life can, assuredly, be sanctified in a more exalted manner, nor in a more wonderful and easy way than by the simple use of the means that God, the sovereign director of souls, gives them to do or to suffer at each moment.

¹ It would be a mistaken idea of the meaning of the author to imagine that he would urge anyone to undertake to lead a spiritual life without the guidance of a director. He explains expressly elsewhere that in order to be able to do without a director one must have been habitually and for a long time under direction. Less still does he endeavor to bring into disrepute the means made use of by the Church for the extirpation of vice and the acquisition of virtue. His meaning, of which Christians cannot be too often reminded, is that of all direction the best is that of Divine Providence, and that the most necessary and the most sanctifying of all practices is that of fulfilling faithfully and accepting lovingly whatever this paternal Providence ordains that we should do or suffer.

IV. In What Perfection Consists

Perfection consists in doing the will of God, not in understanding his designs.

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The designs of God, the good pleasure of God, the will of God, the operation of God, and the gift of his grace are all one and the same thing in the spiritual life. It is God working in the soul to make it like unto himself. Perfection is neither more nor less than the faithful cooperation of the soul with this work of God, and is begun, grows, and is consummated in the soul unperceived and in secret. The science of theology is full of theories and explanations of the wonders of this state in each soul according to its capacity. One may be conversant with all these speculations, speak and write about them admirably, instruct others and guide souls; yet, if these theories are only in the mind, one is, compared with those who, without any knowledge of these theories, receive the meaning of the designs of God and do his holy will, like a sick physician compared to simple people in perfect health. The designs of God and his divine will accepted by a faithful soul with simplicity produces this divine state in it without its knowledge, just as a medicine taken obediently will produce health, although the sick person neither knows nor wishes to know anything about medicine. As fire gives out heat, and not philosophical discussions about it, nor knowledge of its effects, so the designs of God and his holy will work in the soul for its sanctification, and not speculations of curiosity as to this principle and this state. When one is thirsty one quenches one's

thirst by drinking, not by reading books that treat of this condition. The desire to know does but increase this thirst. Therefore, when one thirsts after sanctity, the desire to know about it only drives it further away. Speculation must be laid aside, and everything arranged by God as regards actions and sufferings must be accepted with simplicity, for those things that happen at each moment by the divine command or permission are always the most holy, the best, and the most divine for us.

V. The Divine Influence Alone Can Sanctify Us

No reading, nor any other exercise, can sanctify us except insofar as they are the channels of the divine influence.

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Our whole science consists in recognizing the designs of God for the present moment. All reading not intended for us by God is dangerous. It is by doing the will of God and obeying his holy inspirations that we obtain grace, and this grace works in our hearts through our reading or any other employment. Apart from God, reading is empty and vain and, being deprived for us of the lifegiving power of the action of God, only succeeds in emptying the heart by the very fullness it gives to the mind.

This divine will, working in the soul of a simple ignorant girl by means of sufferings and actions of a very ordinary nature, produces a state of supernatural life without the mind being filled with self-exalting

ideas; whereas the proud man who studies spiritual books merely out of curiosity receives no more than the dead letter into his mind, and the will of God having no connection with his reading, his heart becomes ever harder and more withered.

The order established by God and his divine will are the life of the soul, no matter in what way they work or are obeyed. Whatever connection the divine will has with the mind, it nourishes the soul and continually enlarges it by giving it what is best for it at every moment. It is neither one thing nor another that produces these happy effects, but what God has willed for each moment. What was best for the moment that has passed is so no longer because it is no longer the will of God, which, becoming apparent through other circumstances, brings to light the duty of the present moment. It is this duty under whatever guise it presents itself, which is precisely that which is the most sanctifying for the soul. If, by the divine will, it is a present duty to read, then reading will produce the destined effect in the soul. If it is the divine will that reading be relinquished for contemplation, then this will perform the work of God in the soul and reading would become useless and prejudicial. Should the divine will withdraw the soul from contemplation for the hearing of confessions, et cetera, and that even for some considerable time, this duty becomes the means of uniting the soul with Jesus Christ and all the sweetness of contemplation would only serve to destroy this union. Our moments are made fruitful by our fulfillment of the will of God. This is presented to us in countless different ways by

the present duty, which forms, increases, and consummates in us the new man until we attain the plenitude destined for us by the divine wisdom. This mysterious attainment of the age of Jesus Christ in our souls is the end ordained by God and the fruit of his grace and of his divine goodness.

This fruit, as we have already said, is produced, nourished, and increased by the performance of those duties that become successively present and that are made fruitful by the same divine will.

In fulfilling these duties we are always sure of possessing the "better part" because this holy will is itself the better part; it only requires to be allowed to act and that we should abandon ourselves blindly to it with perfect confidence. It is infinitely wise, powerful, and amiable to those who trust themselves unreservedly to it, who love and seek it alone, and who believe with an unshaken faith and confidence that what it arranges for each moment is best, without seeking elsewhere for more or less, and without pausing to consider the connection of these exterior works with the plans of God. This would be the refinement of self-love.

Nothing is essential, real, or of any value unless ordained by God, who arranges all things and makes them useful to the soul. Apart from this divine will, all is hollow, empty, null; there is nothing but falsehood, vanity, nothingness, death. The will of God is the salvation, health, and life of body and soul, no matter to what subject it is applied. One must not, therefore, scrutinize too closely the suitability of things to mind or body in order to form a judgment of their value,

because this is of little importance. It is the will of God that bestows through these things, no matter what they may be, an efficacious grace by which the image of Jesus Christ is renewed in our souls. One must not lay down the law nor impose limits on this divine will since it is all-powerful.

Whatever ideas may fill the mind, whatever feelings afflict the body—even if the mind should be tormented with distractions and troubles, and the body with sickness and pain—nevertheless the divine will is ever for the present moment the life of the soul and of the body; in fact, neither the one nor the other, no matter in what condition it may be, can be sustained by any other power.

The divine influence alone can sanctify us. Without it bread may be poison, and poison a salutary remedy. Without it, reading only darkens the mind; with it, darkness is made light. It is everything that is good and true in all things, and in all things it unites us to God, who, being infinite in all perfections, leaves nothing to be desired by the soul that possesses him.

VI. On the Use of Mental Faculties

The exercise of mental and other faculties is only useful when instrumental of the divine action.

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The mind with all the consequences of its activity might take the foremost rank among the tools employed by God, but has to be deputed to the lowest as a dangerous slave. It might be of great service if made use of in a

right manner, but is a danger if not kept in subjection. When the soul longs for outward help, it is made to understand that the divine action is sufficient for it. When without reason it would disclaim this outward help, the divine action shows it that such help should be received and adapted with simplicity in obedience to the order established by God, and that we should use it as a tool, not for its own sake but as though we used it not, and when deprived of all help as though we wanted nothing.

The divine action although of infinite power can only take full possession of the soul insofar as it is void of all confidence in its own action; for this confidence, being founded on a false idea of its own capacity, excludes the divine action. This is the obstacle most likely to arrest it, being in the soul itself; for, as regards obstacles that are exterior, God can change them if he so pleases into means for making progress. All is alike to him, equally useful or equally useless. Without the divine action all things are as nothing, and with it the veriest nothing can be turned to account.

Whether it be meditation, contemplation, vocal prayer, interior silence, or the active use of any of the faculties, either sensible and distinct, or almost imperceptible; quiet retreat or active employment, whatever it may be in itself, even if very desirable, that which God wills for the present moment is best and all else must be regarded by the soul as being nothing at all. Thus beholding God in all things, it must take or leave them all as he pleases, and neither desire to live, nor to improve, nor to hope, except as he ordains, and never

by the help of things that have neither power nor virtue except from him. It ought, at every moment and on all occasions, to say with St. Paul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) without choosing this thing or that, but "whatsoever you will." The mind prefers one thing, the body another, but, Lord, I desire nothing but to accomplish your holy will. Work, contemplation, or prayer, whether vocal or mental, active or passive; the prayer of faith or of understanding; that which is distinguished in kind or gifted with universal grace: it is all nothing, Lord, unless made real and useful by your will. It is to your holy will that I devote myself and not to any of these things, however high and sublime they may be because it is the perfection of the heart for which grace is given, and not for that of the mind.

The presence of God that sanctifies our souls is the dwelling of the Holy Trinity in the depths of our hearts when they submit to his holy will. The act of the presence of God made in contemplation effects this intimate union only like other acts that are according to the order of God.

There is, therefore, nothing unlawful in the love and esteem we have for contemplation and other pious exercises, if this love and esteem are directed entirely to the God of all goodness who willingly makes use of these means to unite our souls to himself.

In entertaining the suite of a prince, one entertains the prince himself, and he would consider any discourtesy shown to his officers under pretense of wishing for him alone as an insult to himself.

VII. On the Attainment of Peace

There is no solid peace except in submission to the divine action.

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The soul that does not attach itself solely to the will of God will find neither satisfaction nor sanctification in any other means however excellent by which it may attempt to gain them. If that which God himself chooses for you does not content you, from whom do you expect to obtain what you desire? If you are disgusted with the meat prepared for you by the divine will itself, what food would not be insipid to so depraved a taste? No soul can be really nourished, fortified, purified, enriched, and sanctified except in fulfilling the duties of the present moment. What more would you have? As in this you can find all good, why seek it elsewhere? Do you know better than God? As he ordains it thus, why do you desire it differently? Can his wisdom and goodness, be deceived? When you find something to be in accordance with this divine wisdom and goodness ought you not to conclude that it must needs be excellent? Do you imagine you will find peace in resisting the Almighty? Is it not, on the contrary, this resistance that we too often continue without owning, even to ourselves, that is the cause of all our troubles? It is only just, therefore, that the soul that is dissatisfied with the divine action for each present moment should be punished by being unable to find happiness in anything else. If books, the example of the saints, and spiritual conversations deprive the soul of peace; if they fill the mind without satisfying it;

it is a sign that one had strayed from the path of pure abandonment to the divine action, and that one is only seeking to please oneself. To be employed in this way is to prevent God from finding an entrance. All this must be got rid of because of being an obstacle to grace. But if the divine will ordains the use of these things, the soul may receive them like the rest—that is to say—as the means ordained by God, which it accepts simply to use, and leaves afterward when their moment has passed for the duties of the moment that follows. There is, in fact, nothing really good that does not emanate from the ordinance of God, and nothing, however good in itself, can be better adapted for the sanctification of the soul and the attainment of peace.

VIII. To Estimate Degrees of Excellence

The perfection of souls, and the degree of excellence to which they have attained, can be gauged by their fidelity to the order established by God.

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The will of God gives to all things a supernatural and divine value for the soul submitting to it. The duties it imposes, and those it contains, with all the matters over which it is diffused, become holy and perfect because, being unlimited in power, everything it touches shares its divine character. But in order not to stray either to the right or to the left, the soul should only attend to those inspirations that it believes it has received from God, by the fact that these inspirations do not withdraw it from the duties of its state. These duties are the most clear manifestation of the will of God, and nothing

should take their place; in them there is nothing to fear, nothing to exclude, nor anything to be chosen. The time occupied in the fulfillment of these duties is very precious and very salutary for the soul by the indubitable fact that it is spent in accomplishing this holy will. The entire virtue of all that is called holy is in its approximation to this order established by God; therefore nothing should be rejected, nothing sought after, but everything accepted that is ordained and nothing attempted contrary to the will of God.

Books and wise counsels, vocal prayer and interior affections, if they are in accordance with the will of God, are instructive, and all help to guide and to unify. In contemning all sensible means to this end, Quietism is greatly to blame, for there are souls that are intended by God to keep always to this way. Their state of life and their attraction show this clearly enough. It is vain to picture any kind of abandonment from which all personal activity is excluded. When God requires action, sanctity is to be found in activity. Besides the duties imposed on everyone by their state of life, God may require certain actions that are not included in these duties, although they may not be in any way opposed to them. An attraction and inspiration are then the signs of the divine approval. Souls conducted by God in this way will find a greater perfection in adding the things inspired to those that are commanded, taking the necessary precautions required in such cases, that the duties of their state may not clash with those things arranged by Providence.

God makes saints as he pleases, but they are made always according to his plan and in submission to his will. This submission is true and most perfect abandonment.

Duties imposed by the state of life and by Divine Providence are common to all the saints and are what God arranges for all in general. They live hidden from the world, which is so evil that they are obliged to avoid its dangers; but it is not on this account that they are saints, but only on account of their submission to the will of God. The more absolute this submission becomes, the higher becomes their sanctity. We must not imagine that those whose virtue is shown in wonderful and singular ways, and by unquestionable attractions and inspirations, advance less on that account in the way of abandonment. From the moment that these acts become duties by the will of God, then to be content only to fulfill the duties of a state of life, or the ordinary inspirations of Providence would be to resist God, whose holy will would no longer retain the mastery of the passing moments, and to cease practicing the virtue of abandonment. Our duties must be so arranged as to be commensurate with the designs of God, and to follow the path designated by our attraction. To carry out our inspirations will then become a duty to which we must be faithful. As there are souls whose whole duty is defined by exterior laws, and who should not go beyond them because restricted by the will of God, so also there are others who, besides exterior duties, are obliged to carry out faithfully that interior rule imprinted on their hearts. It would be a foolish and

frivolous curiosity to try to discover which is the most holy. Each has to follow the appointed path. Perfection consists in submitting unreservedly to the designs of God and in fulfilling the duties of one's state in the most perfect manner possible. To compare the different states as they are in themselves can do nothing to improve us since it is neither in the amount of work, nor in the sort of duties given to us that perfection is to be found. If self-love is the motive power of our acts, or if it be not immediately crushed when discovered, our supposed abundance will be in truth absolute poverty because it is not supplied by obedience to the will of God. However, to decide the question in some way, I think that holiness can be measured by the love one has for God and the desire to please him, and that the more his will is the guiding principle and his plans conformed to and loved, the greater will be the holiness, no matter what may be the means made use of. It is this that we notice in Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. In their separate lives there is more of love than of greatness, and more of the spirit than of the matter. It is not written that they sought holiness in things themselves, but only in the motive with which they used them. It must therefore be concluded that one way is not more perfect than another, but that the most perfect is that which is most closely in conformity with the order established by God, whether by the accomplishment of exterior duties or by interior dispositions.

IX. Sanctity Made Easy

Conclusion of the first chapter. How easy sanctity becomes when this doctrine is properly understood.

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I believe that if those souls that tend toward sanctity were instructed as to the conduct they ought to follow, they would be spared a good deal of trouble. I speak as much of people in the world as of others. If they could realize the merit concealed in the actions of each moment of the day—I mean in each of the daily duties of their state of life—and if they could be persuaded that sanctity is founded on that to which they give no heed as being altogether irrelevant, they would indeed be happy. If besides, they understood that to attain the utmost height of perfection, the safest and surest way is to accept the crosses sent them by Providence at every moment, that the true philosopher's stone is submission to the will of God, which changes into divine gold all their occupations, troubles, and sufferings, what consolation would be theirs! What courage would they not derive from the thought that to acquire the friendship of God, and to arrive at eternal glory, they had but to do what they were doing, but to suffer what they were suffering, and that what they wasted and counted as nothing would suffice to enable them to arrive at eminent sanctity: far more so than extraordinary states and wonderful works. O my God! How much I long to be the missionary of your holy will, and to teach all men that there is nothing more easy, more attainable, more within reach, and in the power of everyone, than sanctity. How I wish that I

could make them understand that just as the good and the bad thief had the same things to do and to suffer; so also two persons, one of whom is worldly and the other leading an interior and wholly spiritual life have, neither of them, anything different to do or to suffer; but that one is sanctified and attains eternal happiness by submission to your holy will in those very things by which the other is damned because he does them to please himself, or endures them with reluctance and rebellion. This proves that it is only the heart that is different. Oh! All you that read this, it will cost you no more than to do what you are doing, to suffer what you are suffering, only act and suffer in a holy manner. It is the heart that must be changed. When I say heart, I mean will. Sanctity, then, consists in willing all that God wills for us. Yes! Sanctity of heart is a simple “*fiat*,” a conformity of will with the will of God.

What could be more easy, and who would refuse to love a will so kind and so good? Let us love it then, and this love alone will make everything in us divine.