

**Articles and Sermons :: Letters from Fenelon To Women**

Letters from Fenelon To Women - posted by StarofG0D (), on: 2011/5/16 13:33

TO LA SGEUR CHARLOTTE DE SAINT-CYPRIEN, CAR-MELITE. DANGERS OF INTELLECTUAL ATTRAC-TIONS.

Nov. 30.

WHAT will you say, my dear Sister ? I have not had one available moment in which to read your " Life of the Blessed Jean de la Croix," but I hope soon to read it carefully. . . . What I would desire for you, dear Sister, is that you should not trust too much to intellect in your obedience. Do not obey a man because he can argue more forcibly or speak more feelingly than others, but

because he is providentially ordered for you and is your natural superior, or because apart from all else you feel that he more than others is able to help you to conquer your infirmities and attain to self-renunciation. A director is of little use in teaching detachment from self when it is self-will which seeks him. O my dear Sister, how I wish I could teach you true poverty of spirit! Remember what S. Paul says : " We are fools for Christ's Sake, but ye are wise." J I would fain see in you no wisdom save that of grace, which leads faithful souls in the sure way when they do not yield to temper, their passions, or self-will, or to any merely natural impulse. To such as these all that the world calls talent, taste, and good reasoning is as nought.

CXIX.

TO THE SAME. OX THE SAME SUBJECT.

I CAN only repeat what I have ventured to say frequently before : Beware of your own intellectual gifts, and those of others ; judge no one according to them. God, the only wise Judge, goes on a very different line ; He gives the preference to children and childlike minds. Read nothing out of mere curiosity, or in order to confirm your own opinions ; rather read with a view to foster a 1 I Cor. iv. 10.

hearty spirit of meekness and submission. Talk little of yourself, and never save as a matter of obedience. Be as frank as a child towards your superiors. Make no count at all of your lights or extraordinary graces. Abide in simple faith, content to be obscure and unremitting in obedience to God's Commandments and the Evangelical Counsels as set forth in your Rule. Act up to whatever God may make known to you through others, and accept meekly whatever may seem strange to you. Self-forgetfulness should take the shape of crushing out self-will, not

of neglecting that watchfulness which is essential to the real love of God. The greater your love, the more jealously you will watch over yourself, so that nothing may creep in unworthy of that love. This, dear Sister, is all I have to say to you : receive it in the same spirit with which I write. I ask our Lord to give you a deeper understanding of these things than anything I can say, and Himself to be all in all to you.

cxx.

TO THE SAME. SICKNESS A TRUE PENITENTIAL EXERCISE.

. . . No one can be more sorry for your sufferings than I am, and I forgive them for hindering you in your penitential exercises. Are not sickness and pain a continual penitential exercise given us by God, and infinitely better adapted to our needs by His Hand than anything we could choose for ourselves ? What is to be aimed at in any penitential works save mortification of the flesh and submission of the spirit to God ? As to your reading, I cannot regret the loss, so long as it pleases God to deprive you of the power to read. All the best books in the world put together cannot teach one so much as the Cross. It is better to be crucified with Jesus Christ than to read His " Sufferings ; " this last is often only an interesting study, or at best an exercise of the affections, whereas the other is the real solid fruit, and carrying out in practice the result of all our prayers and meditations. So go on bearing your pain in silence and tranquillity, dear Sister : no better meditation than union with Christ on His Cross. No one can suffer quietly for the love of God without praying most really and purely. And so you may safely let books alone ; books are only useful in so far as they teach and fit us for this self-sacrificing prayer. You will remember the passage in which S. Augustine, speaking of the final moment of his conversion, says that after having read certain words of S. Paul, "No further would I read, nor needed I ; for a light as it were of security was infused into my heart." ' When God supplies inward nourishment, we do not need it from without. The word from without is only given in order to supply that which is inward ; and when God tries us by depriving us of that which is external, He makes up for the deficiency by supplying the need, and not leaving us to our own destitution. Be it yours, then, to wait silently and lovingly upon Him. Occupy your mind with whatever His Grace may suggest in meditation, to make up for what you cannot have by means of reading. Verily Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of the Father, is a Divine Book of teaching. Sometimes we seek merely to indulge our curiosity in reading, or to gratify our intellect ; and then God weans us from such pleasure by sickness. He trains us by helplessness and a languid incapacity which is very trying and humbling to self-love. But what an excellent lesson ! Where is the book which could teach one so much ?

One thing I do very earnestly intreat of you is honestly to spare your strength, and to receive the alleviations afforded you as you would wish some one else to whose needs you ministered to receive them. Such simple, unaffected conduct will be a greater mortification to you than the austerities you regret, but which are out of the question. Moreover, God is better served by one who, overwhelmed with suffering, is content to be deprived of all consolation, than by those who are absorbed in the most conspicuous works. "To whom will I look, saith the Lord, but to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word ? " ' The one class find their stay in their own lights, their own exertions, their own works, but God carries the other tenderly in His own Arms. Weep as much as you will over the faults which you say God brings to your mind ; I like what you call your stupidity a hundredfold better than your fine intellectual feelings, which are a purely hollow stay. Be content with what God gives you, and that alike in every kind of vicissitude. Once more, take care both of body and mind, for both are exhausted.

Spiritual letters of Archbishop F  nelon : letters to women (1877)
<http://www.archive.org/details/spiritualletters00fnuoft>

Re: Letters from Fenelon To Women - posted by StarofG0D (), on: 2011/5/16 13:42

CV.

Self-Consciousness

I QUITE understand that all your troubles come from excessive self-consciousness, and from letting yourself be too much guided by feeling. Directly that you do not find prayer a downright solace to you, you are depressed. Would you be at rest ? then try to be less occupied with yourself, and more with God. Do not dissect and judge yourself, but leave yourself to be judged by the spiritual guide you have chosen. Of course we are sometimes engrossed with ourselves without meaning it, and imagination causes many relapses into this unprofitable occupation ; but I do not ask what is impossible, I shall be content if you are not voluntarily absorbed in self and do not deliberately aim at judging yourself by your own lights. Directly that you find yourself beginning to do this, turn away as from a temptation, and do not let that become intentional which was at first unconscious.

Nevertheless, do not suppose that this course which I advise is intended anyway to interfere with that vigilance over yourself which Jesus Christ teaches in the Gospel. The best possible vigilance is to watch as in God's Sight against the delusions of self-love. Now, one of the most dangerous of all these delusions is when we grow sentimental over ourselves, are perpetually self-engrossed, and feed upon ourselves with a restless, anxious care which withers and disables the heart, keeps us from realising God's Presence, and ends by hopelessly depressing and discouraging us. Say with S. Paul, " Yea, I judge not

mine own self : " ' you will watch all the better for the real correction of your faults, and the fulfilment of your duties, because of the absence of all this restless self-willed fidgetiness. Then it will be out of love of God that you will simply and quietly repress whatever you see by that clear penetrating light to be faulty and unworthy of the Beloved; you will work at conquering your failings without impatience or pettishness ; you will tolerate yourself without flattery ; you will accept reproof and be ready to obey. Such a line of conduct tends far more to self-renunciation than yielding to all the impatience and vexation and fancies of your own wilfulness. Moreover, when we attempt to judge ourselves by our own feelings, we take an altogether wrong standard. God only requires that which it is in our power to give, and that happens to be our will. Feeling is not in our own power we can neither win nor lose it as we please. The most hardened sinners have at times better feelings in spite of themselves, and the greatest saints have been horribly tempted by evil feelings which they abhorred, but such feelings have tended to humble, mortify, and
1 I Cor. iv. 3.

purify them. S. Paul tells us that our strength is made perfect in weakness. 1 So it is not feeling but consent 3 which makes us guilty.

Why should you suppose God is afar off because you cannot perceive Him ? He is always, you may be sure, near to those whose hearts are blank and sorrowful. No pains of yours will win the conscious sweetness of His Presence. What do you seek to love ? your own pleasure or the Beloved One ? If the first only, then it is yourself, not God, that you seek. People often deceive themselves as to the hidden life, fancying that they are aiming at God, when self-pleasing is their real aim ; and when they cease to find delight or consolation in their religious exercises, they turn from Him in disappointment. Assuredly it is never right to sacrifice that highest delight for the sake of mere earthly pleasures ; but if it fails you, go on in love, and serve God in spite of weariness and disappointment. Love is of the purest when not stimulated by reward, and we often make most progress just when we think all is lost ! Love suffering on Calvary is far higher than love glowing with excitement on Mount Tabor.

I don't care about seeing you a very great or very wise and good woman. I want everything on a small scale. Be a good little child.

1 2 Cor. xii. 9. * " Pas le sentir, mais le consentir.'

Re: - posted by StarofGOD (), on: 2011/5/16 13:44

CVL

TEARFULNESS.

Do not be afraid ; you insult God by mistrusting His Goodness ; He knows better than you what you want and are able to bear ; He will never try you beyond your strength. So I repeat it ; fear nothing, O you of little faith ! The experience of your own weakness shows you how little you can reckon on yourself or your best resolutions. Sometimes one might suppose, to see the warmth of one's feelings, that nothing could throw one back, and .then, after having exclaimed, like S. Peter, " Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee ! " one ends like him by being frightened at a servant maid, and denying our Lord ! Weak indeed we are ! but while such weakness is deplorable, the realisation thereof is most useful if it strips us of all self-reliance. A weakness which we know and which humbles us is worth more than the most angelic goodness complacently self-appropriated ! So be weak and depressed if God permits it; but at all events be humble, frank, and docile in your depression. Some day you will laugh at all your present fears, and will thank God for all that I say so harshly to drive you out of your timid prudence.