

## The spiritual warfare : Instruction of the Virgin Mary

Source : *The mystical city of God* by Maria of Agreda (1602-1665)

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410. My dearest daughter, keep in mind, that all the living are born destined for death, but ignorant of the time allowed them; this they know for certain however, that the term of life is short, that eternity is without end, and that in this life only they can harvest what will yield life or death eternal. In this dangerous pilgrimage of life God has ordained, that no one shall know for certain, whether he is worthy (Eccles. 9, 1) of his love or hate; for if he uses his reason rightly, this uncertainty will urge him to seek with all his powers the friendship of that same Lord. God justifies his cause as soon as the soul acquires the use of reason; for from that time onward He enlightens and urges and guides man toward virtue and draws him away from sin, teaching him to distinguish between water and fire, to approve of the good and reject evil, to choose virtue and repel vice. Moreover, God calls and rouses the soul by his holy inspirations and continual promptings, provides the help of the Sacraments, doctrines and commandments, urges man onward through his angels, preachers, confessors, ministers and teachers, by special tribulations and favors, by the example of strangers, by trials, deaths and other happenings and dispositions of his Providence; He disposes the things of life so as to draw toward Him all men, for He wishes all to be saved. Thus He places at the disposal of the creature a vast field of benevolent help and assistance, which it can and should use for its own advancement.

Opposing all this are the tendencies of the inferior and sensitive nature, infected with the *fomes peccati*, the foment of sin, tending toward sensible objects and by the lower appetites and repugnances, disturbing the reason and enthraling the will in the false liberty of ungoverned desires. The demon also, by his fascinations and his deceitful and iniquitous suggestions obscures the interior light, and hides the deathly poison beneath the pleasant exterior. But the Most High does not immediately forsake his creatures; He renews his mercy and his assistance, recalling them again and again, and if they respond to his first call, He adds others according to his equity, increasing and multiplying them in proportion as the soul corresponds. As a reward of the victory, which the soul wins over itself, the force of his passions and concupiscences is diminished, the spirit is made free to soar higher and rise above its own inclinations and above the demons.

412. But if man neglects to rise above his low desires and his forgetfulness, he yields to the enemy of God and man. The more he alienates himself from the goodness of God, so much the more unworthy does he become of the secret callings of the Most

High, and so much the less does he appreciate his assistance, though it be great. For the demon and the passions have obtained a greater dominion and power over his intellect and have made him more unfit and more incapable of the grace of the Almighty. Thereon, my dear daughter, rests the whole salvation or condemnation of souls, that is, in commencing to admit or resist the advances of the Lord. I desire thee not to forget this doctrine, so that thou mayest respond to the many calls which thou receivest of the Most High. See thou be strong in resisting his enemies and punctually solicitous in fulfilling the pleasure of thy Lord, for thereby thou wilt gratify Him and attend to the commands made known to thee by divine light. (book 1, chapter XXV)

477. My daughter, human nature is imperfect and remiss in practicing virtue, and easily weakens in its exercise; for it continually seeks rest and evades labor with all its might. When the soul listens to and extemporizes with the animal and carnal part of its nature this latter will engross and overcome the forces of reason and of the spirit, and will reduce them to a dangerous and shameful slavery. This disorder is abominable and much to be feared by all ; but God abhors it without comparison more in his ministers and in religious: they, as a matter of course, are supposed to be perfect, and therefore are injured so much the more seriously, if they do not come out victorious in the conflict of the passions. By remissness in battle and by their frequent defeats they live themselves into a paralyzing and self-satisfied conviction of false security, content with the performance of certain easy outward practices of virtue, at the same time imagining (without the least real advancement) that they are moving mountains. The demon then introduces other distractions and temptations, and on account of their small appreciation of the rules and practices of religion, they begin to weaken in all of them, esteem them as light and unimportant matter, and, living on in their false security, come to lose the very perception of true virtue.

478. I desire that thou, my daughter, guard against this error. Remember, that a voluntary remissness in regard to one imperfection prepares and opens the way for others: these facilitate the commission of venial sins, these again of mortal sins. Thus the descent is from one abyss to another, until the bottom is found in the disregard of all evil. In order to prevent such a misfortune it is necessary to intercept from afar the current of sin, for the practice or ceremony, which seems but small, is an outwork which keeps the enemy at a distance, while the precepts and laws concerning more important matters are the fortress walls of conscience. If the demon can break through and gain the outer defenses, he is in better position to gain the inner ones. If then an opening is made in the bulwarks by the commission of sin, although it may not be a very grievous one, he already has a better opportunity to make an assault on the interior reign of a soul. As the soul finds herself weakened by vicious acts and habits and without strength

of grace, she does not resist the attack with fortitude, and the devil, acquiring more and more power over her, begins to subject and oppress her without opposition.

*(City of God, book 2, chapter 3)*

458. The vow of chastity includes purity of body and soul; this is easily lost, and it is difficult, sometimes, according to the manner of losing it, even impossible to repair. This great treasure is deposited in a castle, which has many portals and openings, and if these are not all well guarded and defended, the treasure is without security. My daughter, in order to preserve perfectly this vow, it is necessary to make an inviolable pact with thy senses, not to use them, except for what is according to the dictates of reason and for the glory of the Creator. After once the senses are mortified, it will be easy to overcome thy enemies, for only through them can they conquer thee; for no thoughts can recur, or be awakened to activity, unless fomented and excited by the images and impressions admitted through the exterior senses. Thou shouldst not touch, nor look upon, nor speak to any person of whatever condition, whether man or woman, so as to let their images or resemblances find entrance into thy imagination. This carefulness, which I enjoin, will be the guard of the purity, which I require of thee. If on account of charity or obedience thou must converse with them (for only these virtues are sufficient causes for conversing with creatures), do it with alt gravity, modesty and reserve.

459. In regard to thy own person, live as if thou wert a pilgrim and stranger in this world; be poor, mortified, laborious, loving the hardship connected with temporal things, without expecting alleviation or enjoyment, as one who is absent from her home and her country, enlisted to work and battle against powerful foes. Since the flesh is the center of weakness and danger, it is proper that thou carefully resist thy natural likings, and through them the temptations of the demons. Raise thyself above thyself, and seek a habitation far above all that is earthly in order that thou mayest live under the shadow of Him, whom thou desirest (Cant. 2, 3) and in his protection thou shalt enjoy tranquillity and true refreshment.

*(City of God, book 2, chapter 3)*

448. In this life any punishment or tribulation fills mortals with fear and dread, merely because it affects the senses and brings them in close touch with it through them, but the guilt of sin does not affect them nor fill them with dread. Men are entirely taken up by that which is visible, and they therefore do not look upon the ultimate consequences of sin, which is the eternal punishment of hell. Though this is imbibed and inseparably connected with sin, the human heart becomes so heavy and remiss that it remains as if it were stupefied in its wickedness, because it does not feel it present in its senses. Though it could see and feel it by faith, this itself remains listless and dead, as if it were wanting entirely. O most unhappy blindness of mortals,

O torpid negligence, that holds so many souls, capable of reason and of glory, oppressed in deceit! There are not words or sentences sufficient to describe this terrible and tremendous danger. My daughter, haste away, and fly with holy fear such an unhappy state, and deliver thyself up to all the troubles and torments of life, which pass soon, rather than incur such a danger; for nothing will be wanting to thee, if thou do not lose God. To be convinced that there are no small faults for thee and for thy state, is a powerful means of saving thyself; fear greatly the small things, for in despising small faults the Most High knows, that the human heart invites other greater ones. That is not a blameless love, which does not avoid all displeasure of the beloved one.

(*City of God*, book 2, chapter 3)

## Comments of the Eternal Father

The love of God is most sensitive, the human will is most frail and limited; if it is divided, it can only be small and very imperfect in its activity, easily coming to nought. Therefore I did not wish Her, who was to be the example of all holiness and who was free from all danger of a fall through my protection, to be renowned, or specially honored during her life, nor was She to be brought to the temple amid the outward show of honor.

419. Moreover, I have sent my Onlybegotten from heaven and have created Her, who was to be his Mother, for the very purpose of drawing the world from its error and of undeceiving mortals, who have established the unjust and sinful law, that the poor are to be despised and the rich esteemed, that the humble are to be humiliated and the proud to be exalted, the virtuous to be maligned and the sinful applauded, that the timorous and modest are to be considered as fools and the arrogant to be held as valiant, that poverty should be considered as shameful and unfortunate, while riches, pomp, ostentation, splendor, honors, perishable pleasures should be sought and prized by foolish and carnal men. All this the incarnate Word and his Mother, in coming among them, were to reprove and condemn as deceitful and false, so that mortals might perceive the terrible danger of loving and entertaining so blindly the deceitful sensible pleasures, in which they live. Through this insensate love it happens that they so persistently fly from humility, meekness and poverty and evade all that pertains to the true virtue of penance and abnegation of self. And yet these virtues are truly acceptable in my eyes and according to my justice; for the holy, the honorable, the just actions, are to be rewarded with eternal glory, whereas the contrary ones are to be visited by everlasting punishment.

(*City of God*, book 2, chapter 1)