

Holy Wisdom

The Instrument of Perfection: Mortification

The Second Treatise

Fr. Augustine Baker



Stabat Mater PRes

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**Holy Wisdom; Or, Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation — THE SECOND
TREATISE**

By the Venerable Father Augustine Baker

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Editing has been made for the purpose to correct typological, grammatical, or spelling errors in the originally work. Any apparent remaining errors in the work have remained by reason of maintaining the intent of the author.

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The Second Treatise

Mortification: The Instrument of Perfection



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First Section

Of Mortifications in General



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Duties in Mortification and Prayer

§§ 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. All the duties of a contemplative life reduced to two heads, viz. 1. Mortification; 2. Prayer. And the grounds of that division.

§ 6. The necessity of each of these.

§ 7. How they do advance each the other.

§§ 8, 9, 10. Of the two, Prayer is the more noble.

1 . Having so largely treated of the nature and end of a contemplative life in general, as likewise of the only Divine Master from whom it is to be learned, and the school of solitude in which He gives His directions, order requires that we now treat of the special instructions touching the means or instruments conducing to the obtaining of the supernatural end aspired to by us. Concerning which our discourse will not need to be so diffused, considering the large scope that we have allowed to ourselves in the first general treatise, in which mention also was made of much of that which is to follow.

2. Several mystical authors, each one abounding in his own sense, and raising a frame of spirituality as suited best to his own imagination and design, have made several partitions of the duties of a spiritual life, and it is not a matter much considerable which of them should be preferred. But to the end the best ease and help may be afforded to

the devout reader's memory, the division of them shall be the shortest that may be, yet sufficiently and clearly enough comprehending all necessary duties, namely, under these two heads of—1. Mortification; 2. Prayer.

3. Now to the end that the grounds of the fitness of this division may be better understood, we are to remember that the glorious end of a contemplative life, to wit, union in spirit with God by love, is entirely supernatural and divine, so that it is impossible for man by any natural ability and strength, although he were free from sins, to attain unto it; and much more is this impossible to him in his present state, since he is naturally most averse from it, being wholly possessed and filled with nothing but self-love, propriety, and pride, absolutely inconsistent with such an union. Therefore, the foundation of all our spiritual duties must be a true knowledge—1. of ourselves, our own nothing, our unprofitableness, vileness, and misery, which is to be the object of our aversion and hatred; and 2. of the all-sufficiency, universal being, infinite perfections, and incomprehensible beauty and goodness of God, who is to be the only object of our contemplation and love; and, consequently, upon this knowledge all our endeavours towards this end (being directed by a Divine light and assisted by Divine grace) must be employed, first, in removing those impediments; and next, consequently, in approaching directly to God, an immediate union with whom is aspired to, as the only end of our creation and perfection of our intellective nature. We must renounce and fly from ourselves, that we may draw near unto God; we must destroy self-love in our souls, that so the Divine love may be raised and increased in them. Now, it is by Mortification that self-love and all other our natural deordinations, which hinder a divine union, are removed; and it is by Prayer that we directly tend to a divine union. By the former we exercise all duties and practise all virtues which regard ourselves (for virtues

are so far only to be esteemed worthy of that name, inasmuch, and as far as they are mortificatory to our inordinate passions and affections, as humility of pride, patience of anger, temperance of sensual desires, &c.), and prayer (in the notion in which it is here understood) includes all our duties directly pertaining to God, as comprehending all manner of internal actuations and operations of the soul towards God, by the understanding, contemplating, and admiring Him; by the will and affections adoring, obeying, loving, and adhering to Him; and, in a word, the whole soul resigning and submitting itself, and the body also, with all things belonging to each of them, to be disposed according to His divine will, both for time and eternity.

4. This division deserves the rather to be approved, because Hesychius, an ancient illuminated monk, in his treatise *De Puritate Cordis*, hath conformably reduced all spiritual duties to: 1. temperance; 2. and prayer. By temperance understanding the very same that is here meant by mortification; for, as he expresses his meaning, this temperance is a general abstaining from all things that would any way disorder the affections, or obscure the light of the soul. He calls it likewise *Custodiam Cordis*, a guard or watch set over the heart, forcing it to repel all vain and unprofitable thoughts, which, if they be too freely admitted, do hinder from observing the snares and suggestions of the devil or of our corrupt nature, and do withal disturb the tranquillity of the soul.

5. In those two duties, therefore, of mortification and prayer, all good is comprehended; for by the exercise of mortification those two general most deadly enemies of our souls, self-love and pride, are combated and subdued, to wit, by the means of those two fundamental Christian virtues of divine charity and humility. And prayer, exercised in virtue of these two, will, both by way of impetration obtain, and also with a direct efficiency ingraft, a new divine principle and nature in us,

which is the Divine Spirit; which will become a new life unto us, and the very soul of our souls, by degrees raising us higher and higher out of our corrupt nature, till at last we be made one with God, by an union as perfect, constant, and immediate as in this frail life an intellective soul is capable of.

6. And both these duties of mortification and prayer are so absolutely necessary that they must neither of them ever cease, but continually increase in perfection and virtue to the end of our lives. For though self-love and pride may by mortification be subdued, yet as long as we are imprisoned in mortal bodies of flesh and blood, they will never be totally rooted out of us, but that even the most perfect souls will find in themselves matter enough for further mortification. And again, our union with God by prayer can never either be so constant but that it will be interrupted, so as that the soul will fall from her height back some degrees into nature again; nor is there any degree of it so perfect, pure, and spiritual, but that it may, and by exercise will, become yet more and more pure without all limits.

7. The diligent exercise of each of these doth much advance the practice of the other. For as mortification is a good disposition to prayer, yea, so necessary that a sensual immortified soul cannot raise herself up so much as to look to God with any cordial desire to please Him, or to love and be resigned to Him, much less to be perfectly united to Him; so, likewise, by prayer the soul obtains light to discover whatsoever inordinate affections in her are to be mortified, and also strength of spiritual grace actually and effectually to subdue them.

8. Hence it may easily appear that of these two prayer is much the more valuable and noble exercise. 1. Because in prayer of contemplation consists the essential happiness both of this life and that which is to come; so that mortification regards prayer as the means disposing to an end; for, therefore, a devout soul is obliged to mortify

her inordinate affections, to the end she may thereby be disposed to a union with God. 2. Because mortifications are never duly and profitably undergone but only in virtue of prayer. Whereas, possible it may be, that prayer alone may be considerably advanced without any other notable mortifications, in case that God hath provided none for the soul. 3. Because prayer is withal in itself the most excellent and effectual mortification; for in and by it the most secret risings of inordinate passions are contradicted, yea, the mind and superior will are wholly abstracted and elevated above nature, so that for the time all passions are quieted, and all creatures, especially ourselves, transcended, forgotten, and in a sort annihilated.

9. Notwithstanding, in case that God, as He seldom fails, do provide for us occasions of mortification out of prayer, if we be negligent in making good use of them to the promoting of ourselves in spirit, we shall decrease both in grace and prayer; as, on the contrary, by a good use of them we shall both certainly and speedily be advanced in the ways of the Spirit. So that neither of them alone is to be relied on. Mortification without prayer will be but superficial, or, it is to be feared, hypocritical; and prayer, with a neglect of mortification, will be heartless, distracted, and of small virtue.

10. The subject, therefore, of this and the following treatise being a recommendation of these two most necessary and most excellent instruments of contemplation, reason requires that of the two mortification should, in the first place, be treated of, inasmuch as it is not only the less perfect, but because, also, the proper use of it is to dispose and make even and plain the way to the other, by levelling the mountains of pride, raising the valleys of sloth, and smoothing the roughness and inequalities of our passions, but especially by removing out of the way that general impediment, which is propriety of our natural carnal wills.

Mortification of Venial Sins

§ 1. The mortifications here treated of in particular are not of such sinful deordinations of passions as are acknowledged to be sins, either mortal or venial.

§§ 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. But of such deordinations as are commonly called imperfections, and which may occasion sins.

§ 9. That sin consists in the enjoying of creatures instead of using them.

§§ 10, 11, 12. All venial sins cannot be avoided, but affection to them must.

§§ 13, 14, 15, 16, 17. Wherein such affection consists; and how it is inconsistent with perfection.

1. Now intending to treat of Mortification, first in general, and afterwards of the special kinds of it, at least such as are more peculiar to internal livers, my design is not to discourse in particular of such deordinations as are generally acknowledged to be in themselves sinful, either mortally or, in a grosser manner, venially; that is, such as that the actions or omissions to which they adhere can in no circumstances be lawful or permitted; although the end or pretended intention of them were never so good. Such as are officious lies, smaller revenges, or calumniations. For it is supposed that the souls for whose benefit these instructions were intended are not in a state to stand

in need of advices concerning such matters, but are supposed to be entered into a way of perfection; being desirous—yea, through God's grace resolved—to abandon all things, and to cast away all adhesions and affections whatsoever that are inordinate, not only such as will endanger to kill the soul, but also such as would make it sickly and infirm, or stain the lustre and brightness of it.

2. The objects, therefore, of mortification which I shall chiefly handle, are such defects as though indeed in themselves they be sinful, yet are not acknowledged by all to be so, but are called only imperfections; being such sins as, considering the frailty of our nature, can hardly be avoided, and never totally rooted out; being conversant about objects which we may lawfully and most necessarily use, but the fault is, that we do with some deordination either adhere to or are averted from such objects. In a word, such sins they are that, except when they are more gross, it would be an endless and unprofitable labour to make them matters of confession, although the correcting and abating of them ought to be the object of our daily care.

3. I will endeavour to explain my meaning more fully in this matter, because it is the ground of the whole following discourse. We must know, then, that the duty of a Christian (much more of a soul that aspires to perfection) is to love nothing at all but God, or in order to Him; that is, as a mean and instrument to beget and increase His divine love in our souls. All adhesion to creatures by affection, whether such affection be great or small, is accordingly sinful, more or less; so that, if being deprived of anything or persons whatsoever, or being pained by anything, we find a trouble and sorrow in our minds for the loss or suffering of the thing itself, such trouble, in what degree soever, argues that our affection was sinful, not only because the affection was excessive, but because it was an affection, the object whereof was not God.

4. But yet withal this affection, which I say is unlawful, is not simply such an one as resides and is confined to sensitive nature, for that is impossible to be rooted out; neither is there any fault at all in it, considered as such. For to Adam in the state of innocency, yea, even to our Lord Himself, many objects were pleasing and delightful to sense: His sight and taste took contentment in pleasurable objects, and there was in nature an aversion from pain, and an earnest desire to prolong natural life; and in all this there was not the least imperfection. The affections to creatures, therefore, which we affirm to be sinful, are such as are seated in the superior soul or rational will, by which the mind and will consider and adhere unto creatures, and knowingly and willingly pursue the attaining and enjoying of them, as if they were the good, not of sense only (for so they are), but of the person, which indeed they are not; for the only good of an intellectual nature is God, who alone is exalted above it; whereas all other creatures are but equal or inferior to it. To the superior will, therefore, all things but God must be indifferent as in and for themselves, and only to be loved as they are serviceable to the spirit. So that if things which are unpleasant, yea, destructive to inferior nature, do yet advance the spirit in her tendence to God, or if by the will and providence of God they are presented to her to suffer, she must with all indifference and resignation accept of them, though sensitive nature do never so much struggle and contradict.

5. A most perfect example hereof is given by our Saviour, which we are obliged, to the utmost of our capacity and enablement, to imitate. Though sensitive nature in Him took contentment in life, and in the actions and functions thereof, and above all things did abhor a dissolution by death, especially such a death accompanied with such inexpressible torments and shame; and though, for our instruction, He voluntarily gave way to inferior nature to express such her innocent

inclination and aversion, yet, when the will of His Father opposed itself; and presented Him a cup in the highest degree mortal to nature and all the inclinations thereof, He most willingly, quietly, and cheerfully accepted it, then subduing all reluctances in nature; which reluctances in Him were to the thing itself considered in itself, and not at all to the dictates of the superior soul, the which had so absolute a dominion over sensitive nature that it never opposed itself, or expressed the least unwillingness to conform itself to the dictates of reason, though with its own destruction.

6. Whereas, therefore, there are continually presented to our outward and inward senses infinite objects pleasing and displeasing to them, and that the functions of life, which we are bound to preserve, cannot be exercised without admitting the use of many things delightful to sensitive nature—meats, drinks, recreative conversations, and relaxations of mind, &c.—we are to consider and resolve that none of these things, pleasing to the appetite, are given to be possessed of any affection at all, or fruition, but the mere simple use of them is allowed us for the good of the soul, and the contentment that the appetite naturally takes in them is no further, nor with other intention to be admitted, than inasmuch as thereby the spirit, or rational will, is, or may be, enabled more cheerfully to pursue its supreme good. And with this end and intention, to admit sometimes with caution and discretion, of moderate comforts and contentments to inferior nature, is not in itself at all unlawful; on the contrary, it is fitting, requisite, and necessary.

7. But withal, considering the most miserable and inexpressible corruption of our nature, the violent adhesion of our appetites to sensually pleasing objects, the uncertain and weak dominion that the superior faculties of the soul have over sensitive nature, it is our duty and obligation, not only to be watchful over the sensitive appetite, that

it do not with too much greediness pursue the contentments proper and necessary to it, but also, as much as may be, to abridge the number of them, making as few necessary as may be, and not suffering it to accept all the lawful contentments offered to it, yea, oft to restrain and contradict the inclinations of it. In a word, to use all the industry we can, not to suffer it to run on blindly before, or without the conduct of reason, to things pleasing to it; and when we perceive it does so, to call it back, however, not to suffer reason to favour it and join with it in its desires, but to reserve all our rational inclinations and affections to God only.

8. For the case with us is far different from that it was with Adam during his state of innocency. For then it was no inconvenience, but rather perhaps a help to him, freely to make use of the pleasures afforded him in paradise. Because, though sensual pleasures were to him, considering the exquisiteness of his temper, far more pleasurable than they can be to us, yet his appetite did not so much as desire or wish the least excess; and his spirit was so replenished with divine love that, by admitting of such innocent satisfactions to nature, it rather increased than diminished or interrupted its fervour in tending to God and expressing its gratitude, love, and obedience to Him; whereas, we find all the contrary effects, and therefore must take a quite contrary course.

9. This is the ground of mortification, so proper and necessary in a spiritual life; and these are the venial sins or imperfections that we are continually to combat against. In this point of distinction, between the using of creatures for the good of the spirit, and the enjoying of creatures for the pleasure of sense, without regard to the soul's good and advancement, lies the difference between the children of God and the children of Belial. Yea, in the degrees of such using or enjoying, between perfect good Christians and imperfect; yea, moreover be-

tween those that are perfect in an active, and those in a contemplative state. For wicked men give way deliberately to an habitual enjoying of creatures, without regard to their souls or God, yea, contrary to His command. And imperfect good Christians have no care to root out of their souls an habitual love to creatures, except it be such a love as endangers the soul by expelling charity. And lastly, those that are perfect in an active life, for want of a constant state of recollection do not enjoy a sufficient light to discover how in many things of less importance they give way to sense, preventing reason, and enjoying outward contentments without that purity of intention which contemplatives, being far less distracted, do much more frequently and perfectly exercise.

10. Now, having mentioned this diversity of venial sins and imperfections, before I come to speak further of the mortification here intended, I will add some few considerations touching venial sins, with relation to a contemplative state.

11. If it were required to perfection in a contemplative life that a soul should be entirely free from venial defects, it would be impossible to attain unto it, considering the incurable frailty of our nature, the frequency of temptations, and the incapacity which is in a soul to be in a continual actual guard over herself. True it is that, by perseverance in spiritual prayer, accompanied with mortification, such defects become for number more rare, and for quality less considerable; but though prayer and mortification should continue never so long, a soul will find occasion and a necessity to be in continual resistances against her perverse inclinations, and in such combats will sometimes come off with loss.

12. Venial sins, therefore, are not inconsistent with perfection, although they should be committed never so oft out of frailty, subreption, or ignorance. But if they be committed deliberately, advisedly,

customarily, and with affection, they render the soul in an incapacity of attaining to perfection in prayer, &c. This is a point of great moment and consideration, and therefore, that we may distinguish aright between sinning out of frailty, surprise, or infirmity, and the sinning out of affection to the objects of venial sins, we must know:

13. First, that those are said to fall into venial sins out of frailty, which commit them only when an occasion or temptation unwillingly presents itself, and then are surprised with a sudden passion, or deprived of sufficient vigilance and reflection, but upon an observation of their fault they presently return to themselves, and find a remorse and self-condemnation for it, and an aversion (at least in their superior will) from such things as hinder their approach unto God; or if this be not done presently, however, in their next recollection such offences, if they be of any moment, will be brought into their minds, and will procure a sorrow, and consequently a pardon for them. But when they are out of such occasions or temptations, they do not give way to a pleasure conceived in the objects of them, and much less do they voluntarily seek or intend such occasions.

14. Those, in the second place, are said to sin venially out of affection, who both before and after such faults do deliberately neglect them, yea, and are so far from avoiding the occasions of them that they do oft procure them; and this out of affection, not to the fault, but to the things which they see do often occasion the fault. Such are those that love curiosity in apparel, delicacy of meats, hearing of vain discourses, and that contrive meetings of jollity, from whence they never escape without incurring many defects. Now such souls may perhaps have remorse for the sins so committed, and mention them with sorrow in confession; but yet such remorse and confession is not from the whole heart, not being sufficient to make them avoid the occasions, when this may be done without much inconvenience or

trouble. Yea, they do not sufficiently consider that the very love unto those vanities which occasion greater defects, if it be a deliberate love, is in itself a sin, though no other defects were occasioned by it. Such can make no progress in spiritual prayer; yea, on the contrary, as long as such known voluntary affections, either to the sins or occasions, are not mortified, they do every day decline, and grow more and more indisposed to prayer; which thereby is so distracted, and so full of disquieting remorse, that it is almost impossible to persevere constantly in an exercise so very painful.

15. A hundred imperfections, therefore, though of some more than ordinary moment, are not so contrary to perfection whilst they are incurred by surprise or infirmity, as is an affection retained to the least imperfection, though it be but an unprofitable thought. A well-minded and courageous soul, therefore, at her first entrance into the internal ways of the spirit, must and does in an instant, cut off this deliberate affection to all venial sins and their occasions, with discretion seeking to avoid them; although it may happen, without any great prejudice to her progress, that she may find herself very oft surprised and overcome by many and great faults.

16. Neither ought any soul vainly to flatter herself with a hope of reserving this affection without prejudicing her pretensions to perfection, because one or two examples (almost miraculous) are found of some souls that, notwithstanding such affections, have been visited by God with supernatural favour and exalted to a very sublime prayer, as a late eminent saint writes of her own self.¹ For besides that there was perhaps some excusable ignorance in her of the unlawfulness of

1. St. Teresa makes this acknowledgment of herself in her *Life*, chap. viii.

such affections, we may say that God was pleased to confer on her such extraordinary favours, not so much for her own sake, but rather for the good of others, inasmuch as she was destined by Him to be the mistress and teacher of true contemplative prayer, then almost unknown to the world.

17. But most certain it is that, according to the ordinary established course of Divine Providence, perfection in prayer is accompanied with a proportionate perfection in mortification. And therefore such souls as, during a voluntary habitual affection to venial sins (as to the objects and occasions of them), do seem to have great lights and profound recollections in prayer, (if the said lights and recollections do not urge and incite them to quit such harmful affection), such ought to suspect that all goes not right with them, but may justly fear that the devil hath some influence into such devotions, so utterly destitute of true mortification.