

(Part 2)

They that make these objections, and such other like, neither do thoroughly perceive the whole bottom of this matter, nor yet well weigh what Christ's meaning was, when he commanded his disciples in no wise to be afraid of death. For he meant not that they should in no case once shrink at death, but that they should not so shrink and flee from temporal death, that by forsaking the faith, they should fall into endless death for ever. Who though he would have his soldiers to be bold and therewithal discreet, requireth not yet to have them neither like blocks nor madmen. For as he hath a strong courageous heart that never shrinketh patiently to suffer pain, so he that feeleth none, is like a very block without any sense at all. It were a mad part for a man not to fear to have his flesh cut, and yet should no wise man for any dread of pain be withdrawn from his godly purpose, and so, by the refusal of a small pain, purchase himself a much greater.

A surgeon when a diseased place must be lanced or seared, exhorteth not his patient to imagine that at the same time he shall feel no grief or pain at all, but willeth him in any wise quietly to take it. He denieth not but that it will be right painful unto him. But then again the pleasure that he shall have by the recovery of his health and the avoiding of sorer grief likely to ensue, this shall fully, saith he, recompense altogether.

And albeit our saviour Christ biddeth us rather willingly to suffer death, when there is none other remedy, than for fear thereof to forsake him (and forsake him do we, if before the world we refuse to confess his faith), yet doth he not for all that, command us so to strive against nature, as not once to shrink at death. Insomuch that he giveth us free liberty to avoid all trouble and danger, in case we may so do without prejudice and hindrance of the cause. 'For if they persecute ye,' saith he, 'in one city get ye into another.' Upon which merciful licence and provident advice of our most prudent master, none of the apostles was there in a manner, no nor but few of the most notable martyrs neither that suffered so many years after, but that at one time or other they thus preserved their lives; and to the manifold profit both of themselves and many other more, reserved the same until such season as the secret providence of God foresaw to be more convenient.

Howbeit some time Christ's valiant champions have done far otherwise, and of their own accord professed themselves Christian men, when no creature required it of them, and of their own minds, offered their bodies to martyrdom when no man called for them. Thus hath it liked God for the advancement of his honour, some whiles to keep from the knowledge of the world the great abundant faith of his servants, thereby to disappoint their wily and malicious enemies; and some whiles again so to set it forth, that their cruel persecutors were therewith much incensed, while both they saw themselves deceived of their expectation, and were moreover right angry to consider that the martyrs, that offered themselves to die for Christ's sake, could be overcome by no kind of cruelty.

But yet lo! God of his infinite mercy doth not require us to take upon us this most high degree of stout courage which is so full of hardness and difficulty. And therefore I would not advise every man at adventure rashly to run forth so far forward, that he shall not be able fair and softly to come back again, but unless he can attain to climb up the hilltop, be haply in hazard to tumble down even to the bottom headlong. Let them yet whom God especially calleth thereunto, set

forth in God's name and proceed, and they shall reign. The times, yea the very instants oftentimes and the causes of all things, hath he secret unto himself, and when he seeth time convenient he doth all things, as his deep wisdom, which pierceth all things mightily and disposeth all things pleasantly, ³ before had secretly determined. Whosoever therefore is brought to such a strait, that needs he must either endure some pain in his body, or else forsake God, this man may be right well assured, that he is by God's own will come to such distress. Whereupon hath he without doubt great occasion to be of good comfort, since either God will not fail to deliver him therefrom again, or be ready at his elbow to assist him in his conflict, and so give him the upper hand, that for his victory shall he be crowned.

'For God is true of his promise,' saith the apostle, 'who will not suffer ye to be tempted above that ye may bear, but make ye also with the temptation a way out, that ye may have strength to abide it.' ⁴ Wherefore when we are come to the point, that we must of necessity fight hand to hand with the prince of this world, the devil, and his cruel ministers, so that we cannot shrink back without the defacing of our cause, then would I, lo! counsel every man in this case utterly to cast away all fear. And here would I bid him quietly to set his heart at rest, in the sure hope and trust of God's help, namely ⁵ seeing the scripture telleth us, that whosoever putteth not his confidence in God in the time of tribulation shall find his strength full feeble. But yet before a man falleth in trouble, fear is not greatly to be discommended; and so that reason be always ready to resist and master fear, the conflict is then no sin nor offence at all, but rather a great matter of merit.

For weenest thou that those holy martyrs which shed their blood for Christ's faith were never afraid of death and pain? I will not spend much time in this behalf to make any long rehearsal of other, since St. Paul alone shall serve my turn herein, as well as if I alleged ye a thousand. Yea and if David in the war against the Philistines was reputed as good as ten thousand, well may St. Paul perdy, ⁶ for the proof of that we now speak of, in the fight for the faith against the faithless persecutors, be accounted as sufficient as if I rehearsed ye ten thousand beside. Then this most valiant champion St. Paul, which was so ravished with the love of Christ and the hope he had in him, that he reckoned himself assured of his reward in heaven, insomuch that he said: 'I have fought a good battle, my course have I finished, my faith have I kept, in time coming have I a crown of justice reserved for me,' ⁷ which he so fervently desired and longed for, that he spake these words of himself: 'Christ is my life, and to die were mine advantage,' ⁸ and again: 'I long to be discharged of this body of mine, and to be with Christ,' this selfsame Paul I say for all this, both by policy procured to escape the Jews' deceitful trains ⁹ through the help of a certain captain of the Roman garrison, and afterward got out of prison, alleging that he was a citizen of Rome, and at another time saved himself from the cruel Jews by appealing unto Caesar, and before that, was let down over a wall in a basket, and so avoided the cursed hands of King Aretas.

Here if any man will say that all this while he was in no dread of death at all, but did all this only upon consideration of the great increase of faith, that through his labour and travail might after grow to the world, surely for my part, as I would be loath to deny the one, so dare I not be so bold to warrant the other, since of his own fear that he some time was in (as strong-hearted as he was) maketh he sufficient declaration himself where he writeth unto the Corinthians as followeth: 'When we came to Macedonia our body had no rest, but much tribulation abode we, battle without and fear within.' ¹⁰ Also in another place he writeth unto them in this wise: 'In much weakness was I, in sore dread and fear among you.' ¹¹ And again he saith: 'Brethren, we

would not have you ignorant of our trouble which hath happened in Asia, where we have been above our power so afflicted that we were even weary of our life.' ¹²

Dost thou not hear now St. Paul with his own mouth confess here his own fear and dread and wonderful weariness, more intolerable unto him than death. Insomuch that he seemeth by these words, as it were in a painted table, lively to set forth the painful agony he then abode for Christ. Let me now see whether any man can justly say that Christ's holy martyrs were never afraid of death. And yet for all that could no fear cause St. Paul once to shrink or go back from his good purpose to advance the faith of Christ, nor all the counsel the disciples gave him could not stay him, but that needs forth would he to Jerusalem still, as to the place where-unto he saw well that the spirit of God called him, albeit the prophet Agabus had foreshewed him plain, that there should he be both imprisoned, and further in no little danger of his life too.

Whereby it appeareth that to fear death and torment is none offence, but a great and grievous pain, which Christ came not to avoid but patiently to suffer. And we may not by and by ¹³ judge it a point of cowardice if we see a man either afraid and loath to be tormented, or discreetly eschew peril in such case as he may lawfully do it.

But Mary! for dread of death and torment, either to run quite away when need requireth a man to abide by his tackling, or desperately to yield himself into his enemies' hands, this lo! is by the law of arms reputed a very shameful and traitorous act. For be a man of war never so fainthearted and dismayed before, yet when his captain commandeth him, if he be then ready straightways to set forward and go forth, and do manfully fight and overthrow his enemies, this man may be well assured that his former fear shall no whit abridge his reward, since in good earnest such a one is rather the most of all to be commended, as he that hath overcome both his enemy and his own fear too, wherein consisteth many times more difficulty than to conquer and vanquish a man's mortal enemy.

So indeed our saviour Christ, as his own doings shortly after declared, letted ¹⁴ neither for sorrow, fear, nor weariness, obediently to execute his Father's will and pleasure, and mightily to pass through all those painful pangs, which for our health himself a little before had full wisely been in dread of. But more causes are there than one, for which in the mean season it pleased him to suffer such fear, such sorrow, such weariness, and such inward anguish. It pleased him, I say, since he was not enforced thereunto. For who could have enforced God? It came therefore, without fail, of a wonderful high consideration of himself that his godhead did, for that while, in such wise forbear to give his aid and influence unto his manhood, that he might thereby to his great grief sensibly feel in his own body these troublesome passions of man's frail nature.

But as I was about to say, it liked Christ of his wonderful goodness thus to do, upon sundry considerations. First because he would fulfil the thing for which he came into this world, and that was to set forth and testify the truth. For whereas he was verily both God and man too, yet some were there which because they considered that he had in him hunger, thirst, sleep, weariness, and such-like dispositions, as all other men naturally have, falsely mistook him, and believed he was not God indeed. I mean this not only of the Jews and gentiles in his own time that were so much his enemies, but of those Jews and gentiles also which were many years after, that nevertheless called themselves good faithful Christian men; as Arius and the heretics of his sect, who letted ¹⁵

not to deny that Christ was one in substance with his Father. Whereby raised they many years together much business and ruffle in the Church. But for a most strong treacle " against these venomous heresies, wrought our saviour many a marvellous miracle.

Howbeit afterward rose there as great danger on the other side, as often times from one dangerous peril folk straightways fall in another as jeopardous as the first. For there lacked not some, that so earnestly beheld his glorious and mighty miracles, that the bright shining thereof made their eyes so to dazzle, that contrary to all truth they plainly denied his manhood. Now did these wretches too, following his trade that first began this heresy, never cease by sedition maliciously to break the godly unity of the holy Catholic Church, who by that fond frantic opinion, no less perilous than false, as much as in them lay, laboured to destroy and overthrow the whole mystery of man's redemption, in that they went about to cut from us and, as a man might say, utterly to dry up the gracious moisture of our saviour's death and passion, from whence as out of a well spring issues the water of our salvation.

Now to remedy this deadly disease, it pleased our most gracious and loving physician, by these evident tokens of man's frail nature, as heaviness, fear, weariness, and dread of pain and torment, to declare himself to be a very natural man. Further, for as much as the cause of his coming hither was to suffer sorrow and pain for us, thereby to procure us joy and pleasure, like as the joy that he obtained for us was such as should be to our full contentation in soul and body both, so liked it him not in his body only to endure most cruel tormentry, but inwardly also to feel in his blessed soul the sore anguish of sorrow, fear, and weariness; partly to the end that the more pains he took from us, the more should we be bounden to love him; and partly to put us in remembrance how unreasonable a thing it were, if we should either refuse to abide any trouble and grief for his sake, that willingly abode so many and great for ours, or grudge to take at his hands such punishment as our offences have righteously deserved; considering we here see that our saviour Christ himself, of his own mere goodness, shrank neither in body nor in soul patiently to suffer so manifold and grievous torments, for no desert on his behalf, but only to purge and put away vile and sinful wretchedness.

Finally, likewise as nothing was to him unknown from the beginning, so foresaw he well that there were like to spring up in his mystical body the Church members of divers conditions and qualities. And albeit that to suffer martyrdom nature is not able without the help of grace, since 'no man,' as saith the apostle, 'can say so much as our Lord Jesus but in the spirit of God,' " yet doth God in such sort bestow his grace upon mankind, that he letteth " not therewhiles nature to work and have her course too, but either suffereth he nature to help forward the grace that he sendeth unto man, to the intent he may the more easily work and do well, or if nature be so froward that it will needs strive there against, yet when it is mastered and overcome by grace, it liketh him that of the difficulty that such folk have in their well doing, there shall grow unto them more matter of merit.

Wherefore forasmuch as Christ did foresee that many there would be so tender of body, that were they never so little in danger of bodily harm, they would be ready forthwith fearfully to tremble and quake, now lest such persons should conceive any inward discomfort, when they should feel themselves so fearful and faint-hearted, and see the martyrs again so stout and courageous, and upon fear to be enforced to faint and give over " might mishap wilfully to yield

and not go through, Christ vouchsafed therefore, I say, to comfort their weak spirits with the example of his own sorrow, heaviness, weariness, and incomparable fear, and unto one that were likely to be in such case, as it were by the lively voice of the precedent, ²⁰ he shewed himself expressly to say: 'Pluck up thy courage, faint heart, and despair never a deal. What though thou be fearful, sorry, and weary, and standest in great dread of most painful tormentry that is like to fall upon thee, be of good comfort for all that, for I myself have vanquished the whole world, and yet felt I far more fear, sorrow, weariness, and much more inward anguish too, when I considered my most bitter painful passion to press so fast upon me. He that is strong-hearted may find a thousand glorious valiant martyrs, whose example he may right joyfully follow. But thou now, O timorous and weak silly sheep, think it sufficient for thee, only to walk after me, which am thy shepherd and governor, and so mistrust thyself and put thy trust in me. For this self same dreadful passage lo! have I myself passed before thee. Take hold on the hem of my garment therefore. From thence shall thou perceive such strength and relief to proceed, as shall much to thy comfort stay and repress this fond fantasy of thine, that maketh thee thus causeless to fear, and give thee better courage, when thou shalt remember, not only that thou followest my steps therein (which am faithful, and will not suffer thee to be tempted above thy power, but give thee with thy temptation a way out, that thou mayest be able to abide it), ²¹ but also that this small and short trouble, which thou sufferest here, shall win thee exceeding great glory in heaven. For the afflictions of this world be nothing worthy the glory that is to come, which shall be revealed in thee. ²² Now having all these things imprinted in thy remembrance take a good heart unto thee, and with the sign of my cross clearly drive from thee these fearful, heavy, dreadful and dull vain imaginations that the spirit of darkness thus worketh in thee, and prosperously go forward on thy journey, and pass through all trouble and adversity, faithfully trusting that by mine aid and help, thou shalt have the upper hand and of me receive for thy reward the glorious crown of victory.'

Thus among other causes for which our saviour vouchsafed to take upon him these afflictions of our frail nature, one was this which I have here before rehearsed, and that as it seemeth very reasonable, that is to wit, he became weak for their sakes that were weak, by his weakness to cure theirs, whom he so entirely tendered, that in all that ever he did in this his bitter agony, it appeareth he meant nothing more, than to teach the faint-hearted soldier how to behave himself in his troublous travail, when he shall be violently drawn to martyrdom. For to the intent he would instruct him that is in fear of danger, both to desire other folk to watch and pray for him, and therewith nevertheless in his own person to recommend himself wholly unto God, and again for that he would have it known that none but himself alone as then should taste the painful pangs of death, when he had commanded those three apostles, whom he took forth with him from the other eight almost to the foot of the hill, to stay still there and to abide and watch with him, then got he himself from them a stone's cast further.

'So when he was gone a little further, down fell he prostrate upon the ground, and prayed, that if it were possible, that hour might pass away from him. And thus he said: 'O Father, Father, unto thee are all things possible. Take away this cup from me, but yet thy will be fulfilled and not mine. O my good Father, if it may be, let this cup pass from me, howbeit do not as I will herein, but as it liketh thee.'

Here doth Christ like a good captain teach his soldier by his own example, first of all to begin with humility, the foundation and ground of all other virtues, which once laid, a man may without danger climb up higher. For Christ albeit he was very God, equal and one in substance

with God his Father, nevertheless for that he was man also, letted ²³ not in most humble wise to cast himself down flat upon the ground before him.

But here, good reader, let us pause awhile, and with entire devotion consider with what meekness our captain Christ lieth thus prostrate upon the ground. For if we earnestly so do, we shall have our hearts so lightened with the bright shining beam of that light, that illumineth every man which cometh into this world, that we shall be able thereby to see, know, lament, and at length to reform this foul folly. For negligent or slothful sluggishness can I not call it, but rather frantic madness and insensible deadly dullness, which causeth a great many of us when we go to make our prayer unto Almighty God, not with reverence attentively to pray to him, but like careless and sleepy wretches hoverly ²⁴ to talk with him. Wherefore I much fear me lest we rather sorely provoke his wrath and indignation, than purchase at his hand any favour or mercy toward us.

Would God we would sometime take so much pain, as soon as we have finished our prayers, as forthwith orderly to call to our remembrance again all things that have passed us in the while we seemed to pray. Lord, how foolish, how fond, and how filthy matters shall we many times there find? We would, I assure you, wonder how our mind could possibly in so short a space stray so much abroad into so many places so far severed asunder, and about so divers and sundry, so many and idle occupations. For if a man would even of purpose for a proof do his endeavour to occupy his thought upon as many and as manifold matters, as by any possibility he could devise, hardly could he, I trow, in so little a while think upon so many things, and so far distant asunder as our idle unoccupied mind wandereth about, while our tongue at adventure pattereth apace, upon our matins and evensong, and other accustomed prayers.

And therefore if a body would muse and marvel what our wits are busied withal, when we be troubled with dreams in our sleep, nothing know I whereunto I may better liken our mind for the while, than if we do imagine it to be in like sort occupied while we be sleeping, as it is when we pray waking (if at the least wise he that prayeth after this manner may be counted waking), while we suffer our foolish mad brain in the mean season, so fast to wander about hither and thither upon so sundry fond fantasies. Saving this only difference is there betwixt them, that these which, as a man might say, thus dream waking, have certain so monstrous, so shameful, and so abominable toys in their heads, while their tongue mumbleth up their prayers in haste without any heed taken thereunto, and their hearts be straying abroad therewhiles in other places, that if a man had seen the like but in his sleep, yet even among children would he not, I am sure, for shame (were he never so shameless) at his uprising utter so frantic fantastical dreams.

And out of all doubt most true is the old said saw, that the outward behaviour and continuance is a plain express mirror or image of the mind, inasmuch as by the eyes, by the cheeks, by the eyelids, by the brows, by the hands, by the feet, and finally by the gesture of the whole body, right well appeareth how madly and fondly the mind is set and disposed. For as we little pass ²⁵ how small devotion of heart we come to pray withal, so do we little pass ²⁶ also how undevoutly we go forward therein. And albeit we would have it seem that on the holy days we go more gorgeously apparelled than at other times only for the honour of God, yet the negligent fashion that we use a great many of us, in the time of our prayer, doth sufficiently declare (be we never so loath to have it so known and apparent to the world), that we do it altogether of a peevish worldly pride. So carelessly do we even in the church somewhiles solemnly jet ²⁷ to and fro, and

other whiles fair and softly set us down again. And if it hap us to kneel, then either do we kneel upon the one knee, and lean upon the other, or else will we have a cushion laid under them both, yea and sometime (namely ²⁸ if we be anything nice and fine) we call for a cushion to bear up our elbows too, and so like an old rotten ruinous house, we be fain therewith to be stayed and underpropped. And then further do we every way discover, how far wide our mind is wandering from God. We claw our head, we pare our nails, we pick our nose and say therewhiles one thing for another, since what is said or what is unsaid both having clean forgotten, we be fain at all adventures to aim what we have more to say. ²⁹ Be we not ashamed, thus madly demeaning ourselves both secretly in our heart, and also in our doings openly, in such wise to sue for succour unto God, being in so great danger as we be; and in such wise to pray for pardon of so many horrible offences; and over that in such wise to desire him to preserve us from perpetual damnation? So that this one offence so unreverently to approach to the high majesty of God, all ³⁰ had we never offended him before, were yet alone well worthy to be punished with a thousand endless deaths.

Well now suppose that thou hadst committed treason against some mighty worldly prince, which were at his liberty either to kill thee or save thee, and this notwithstanding that he would be so merciful unto thee, as upon thy repentance and humble suit for his gracious favour again, be content favourably to change the punishment of death into some fine and payment of money, or further upon the effectual proof and declaration of thine hearty and exceeding shame and sorrow for thy fault, clearly release thee of altogether. Now when thou comest in presence of this prince, suppose thou wouldst unrever-ently, as one that carelessly passed ³¹ not what he did, tell thy tale unto him, and while he sat still and gave good ear unto thee, in the uttering of thy suit all the while jet up and down before him, and when thou hadst jetted thy fill squat thee down fair and well in a chair, or if for good manners' sake thou thoughtest it most seemly for thee to kneel on thy knees, yet then that thou wouldst call somebody first, to fetch thee a cushion to lay underneath thee, yea and besides that to bring thee a stool and another cushion therewithal to lean thine elbows on, and after all this gape, stretch, sneeze, spit, thou carest not how, balk ³² out the stinking savour of thy ravenous surfeiting, and finally so behave thyself in thy countenance, speech, gesture, and thy whole body beside, that he might plainly perceive that while thou spakest unto him, thy mind were otherwise occupied; tell me now, I beseech thee, what good, trowest thou, shouldst thou get at his hand by this tale thus told afore him?

If we should thus handle a case of life and death, in the presence but of some worldly prince, we would I am sure reckon ourselves even quite out of our wits. Whereas he, when he had killed the body, had done his uttermost, and were able to do no more. And be we then, ween you, well advised, which being found faulty in a great many ³³ of matters of much more impor-tance, presume so without reverence to sue for pardon unto the king of all kings, Almighty God himself who, when he hath killed the body, hath power also to cast the soul and body both into the fire of hell for ever. ³⁴

Howbeit I would not any man should so understand my words here, as though I would have nobody to pray either walking or sitting, or lying in his bed either. For gladly would I wish, that whatsoever the body be doing, we would yet in the meanwhile ever more lift up our hearts to God, which is a kind of prayer that he doth most accept, since which way soever we walk, so that our mind be fixed on God never depart we from him which is everywhere present with us.

Howbeit like as the prophet that said unto God: 'I forgat thee not, while I lay in my bed,'³⁵ did not so satisfy himself therewith, but that he would needs rise at midnight³⁶ too, for to laud and praise our Lord, so beside these prayers that we say thus walking, some yet would I have sometimes in such wise to be said, that both should our minds with so godly meditation be prepared, and our bodies in so reverent manner disposed and ordered, that we could not in more humble wise use ourselves, if we should go unto the princes of the whole world, all were they sitting in one place altogether at once.

And without fail this wandering of the mind, as oft as I bethink me thereupon, troubleth my heart full sore. Yet will I not say that every thought (albeit right shameful and horrible) which in the time of our prayer either is put into our mind by the suggestion of our evil angel, or otherwise by the imagination of our own senses creepeth covertly into us, is forthwith deadly sin, if so be we do resist it and quickly cast it off. But Mary, if we be content either gladly to take in such evil thoughts, or suffer them long carelessly to increase in us, I nothing doubt at all but that the weight thereof may in conclusion grow to very deadly and damnable sin indeed. Moreover, when I consider the high majesty of Almighty God, I must needs straightways deem and believe that albeit to have the mind never so little awhile wandering upon other things, is not accounted for mortal sin, yet proceedeth that rather of God's marvellous mercy towards us, whereby it pleaseth him not so to lay to our charge, than that the thing is not of itself so evil as to deserve damnation, since I can in no wise devise how any such lewd thoughts could possibly enter into men's minds while they be praying, that is to wit, while they be talking with God, but only by means of a faint and feeble faith. For seeing our heart strayeth never a deal when we have communication in an earnest matter with a worldly prince, yea or with any officer of his either, that beareth any stroke about him, it were not possible that we should have so much as one vain and strange fantasy in our heads at all, while we make our prayer unto God, if we did firmly and surely believe, that he were presently with us himself, and not only heard what we say, and marked our outward manner as well in our countenance as in all our other gestures beside, and thereby guessed how our heart were inwardly occupied, but also clearly saw and beheld the very bottom of our stomach, as he that by the infinite brightness of his divine majesty maketh all things lightsome; if we believed, I say, that God himself were present, in whose glorious presence all the princes upon earth, even in their most royalty, must needs (but if they be stark mad) plainly grant themselves to be no better than very vile wretched worms of the earth.

Wherefore our saviour Christ, forasmuch as he perceived that there is nothing more profitable for man than prayer, and therewith again considered that, partly by man's negligence, and partly by the malice of the devil, so wholesome a thing almost everywhere taketh but little effect, yea and oftentimes too doth great hurt and harm, determined while he was going toward his passion, both by the manner of his own prayer, and his own example joined thereto, to set forth so necessary a point, to be as it were a full conclusion of all the rest of his doctrine.

And therefore to give us warning, that we ought not only secretly with our heart, but also with our body openly in the face of the world, to serve and honour God, the creator of them both, and to teach us over this, that the reverent and seemly behaviour of the body, albeit the same principally proceedeth of the fervent devotion of the heart, doth nevertheless cause again our inward fervour and reverence to godward to increase and grow greater, he shewed us then a sample himself of most humble submission in prayer; who with such lowly outward gesture

worshipped his heavenly Father, as none earthly prince (unless it were Alexander, when he was in his drunken and riotous rages, and certain other barbarous princes that were so proud of their estate that they looked to have been reputed for gods) durst either for shame require of his subjects, or receive when it was willingly offered. For all the while he prayed, neither did he sit at his ease, nor stand upon his feet, nor yet only kneeled neither, but fell down grovelling flat upon the ground, and there so lying lamentably, besought his Father to be merciful unto him, and still saying: 'Father, Father,' humbly desired that he unto whom nothing is impossible, would vouchsafe, if it might so be, that is to wit, unless he had fully determined to have him taste the cup of this painful passion, else at his request and prayer to preserve him from it, being nevertheless content that his request herein should take no place, if unto his blessed will it seemed not so convenient.

We may not by occasion of these words, reckon that the Son was ignorant of his Father's will and pleasure, but as he came hither to instruct and teach men, so would he have it appear unto them, that he had in him-self very man's affections. And whereas he said twice: 'Father, Father,' he willed us thereby to understand, that God, his Father, is indeed the father of all things both in heaven and earth. Furthermore, he put us by the same in remembrance, that God the Father was to him a double Father. Once by creation, which is a kind of fatherhood, since of truth more rightly come we of God that made us of nought, than of the man that naturally begat us, in as much as God both created our natural father and orderly made and disposed all that matter whereof we ourselves are engendered. And albeit Christ as man in this wise took God for his Father, yet as God took he him for his natural and co-eternal Father.

It may well be too, that he twice called upon him by this name Father, to have it known that he was not alonely a natural Father unto him in heaven but also that he had none other Father here in the world neither, for as much as he was conceived in his manhood of his mother, being a pure virgin without man's seed, by the coming of the Holy Ghost that entered into his mother, that Holy Spirit, I mean, which proceedeth both from his Father and himself, whose doings be evermore all one, and can in no wise by any man's imagination be dissevered.

Now by this his so oft and earnest calling him Father, which declareth an effectual desire to obtain his request, we learn another wholesome lesson beside: that when-soever we heartily pray for anything, and do not forthwith speed thereof, we should not faint and be utterly therewith discouraged, as was the wicked king Saul, who because he received not an answer from God by and by ^{as} he looked for, sought unto a witch and so fell to sorcery and witchcraft, which was both by God's law forbidden, and by himself also not long before inhibited. Then hereby doth Christ teach us still to persevere in prayer, and although we do never obtain the thing which we require, that yet we should not repine and grudge thereat, considering that, as we see here, the Son of God our saviour himself did not obtain his own delivery from death, which he most instantly prayed unto his Father for, saving that evermore (in which part specially ought we to follow his example) he submitted and conformed his own will to the will of his Father.

'And he came to his disciples, and found them asleep.'

Here may we see what difference there is in love. For that love, lo! that Christ bare unto his disciples, very far surmounted the love that they bare toward him again, even they I say that loved him best of all. Who for all the sorrow, fear, dread, and weariness he was so sore panged

with, his most bitter passion drawing so fast upon him, could not for all that forbear, but that needs would he even then go and see how they did; whereas they on the other side, how great love so ever they bare him, as without fail they loved him full tenderly, for all the exceeding peril they saw their most loved master so likely forthwith to fall in, were yet never the more able to keep themselves from sleep.

'Then said he thus to Peter: Sleepest thou, Simon? Couldst thou not endure to watch one hour with me? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit is prompt and ready, but the flesh is frail and weak.'

Oh! what force and efficacy is there in these few words of Christ! And in these gentle words of his, Lord, how sharply doth he touch him! For in that he called him here by the name of Simon, and so called him when he laid to his charge his sluggish sleeping, thereby did he secretly signify that such feebleness and slothful sluggishness was full unfit for him that bare the name of Peter, which name Christ for his constant steadfastness he would should have been in him, had given long erst ³⁸ unto him. And as it was a privy check unto him that he called him not by the name of Peter or Cephas, so sounded it again to his reproach that he named him Simon. For in the Hebrew tongue in which Christ at the same time spake unto him, Simon is as much to say as hearing and obedient. But now when he contrary to Christ's admonition fell to sleeping, then did he neither hear Christ nor obey him neither.

And yet as me seemeth did our saviour not in this wise only covertly control Peter by these his mild words unto him, but somewhat sharply nipped him otherwise also, as if he had earnestly thus spoken unto him and said: 'What, Simon, here playest thou not the part of Cephas, for why shouldst thou any more be called Cephas, that is to wit, a stone, which name I gave thee heretofore to have thee steadfast and strong, when thou shewest thyself so feeble and faint now sleep cometh on thee, that thou canst not abide to watch so much as one hour with me. What, Simon, I say, art thou now fallen asleep? And well worthy art thou perdy ³⁹ to be called by thy first name Simon, for since thou art so heavy asleep, how shouldst thou be named Simon, that is to say, a hearer? Or seeing that I warned thee to watch with me, how canst thou be called obedient? Which as soon as my back was turned like a slothful sluggard straightways wert fallen asleep. Simon, I evermore made most of thee, and art thou now asleep? Simon, I have so many ways advanced thee, and dost thou now sleep? Simon, thou didst but right now boldly boast that if need were thou wouldst die with me, and dost thou now sleep? Simon, even at this point do the Jews and gentiles, and Judas worse than either of them, go about to murder me, and yet dost thou sleep? Yea, Simon, and the devil too laboureth to sift ye all like wheat, and art thou still asleep? Oh! what may I reckon that the rest of my disciples will do, when thou, Simon, seeing me and yourselves too in so extreme peril, art now thus fallen asleep?'

After these words because it should not seem that he touched Peter alone, he began to say unto the rest also:

'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit is prompt and ready, but the flesh is frail and weak.'

Here are we warned continually to pray and here are we taught how profitable and very needful prayer is to stay us, that our frail flesh do not draw back and stop our well-disposed heart, and train ⁴⁰ it headlong into dangerous deadly temptation. For who was bolder spirited than Peter?

And yet how greatly he needed the aid of God to assist him against his frail flesh, plainly appeareth by this, that while by his sleeping he for-slothed ⁴¹ to pray and call for God's help, he gave the devil such advantage upon him, that through the feebleness of his flesh, his courageous spirit was soon after abated, and himself driven clearly to deny and forswear Christ.

Now if it thus fared with the apostles, being so fresh and forward, that while through sleeping they discontinued their prayer they fell into temptation, what shall become of us withered and barren wretches, if in time of danger (which, God wot, seldom are we out of, since our adversary the devil like a ramping lion runneth evermore about, everywhere seeking whom by frailty fallen into sin he may forthwith catch and devour) ⁴² what shall become of us, I say, if in such danger we do not, as Christ bade us, persevere in watch and prayer? Here Christ biddeth us watch, not to play at cards and dice, not to banquet and surfeit, not to drink ourselves drunk, and fulfil our filthy lusts, but he biddeth us watch to pray. And pray doth he bid us not now and then among, ⁴³ but always without any ceasing. 'Pray ye,' saith he, 'without intermission.' ⁴⁴ And he would have us pray, not in the daytime only (for who would bid anybody to watch in the day), but he admonisheth us to bestow also even a good part of that time in hearty prayer that a great sort of us are wont to spend altogether in sleep. Wherefore ought we wretched caitiffs much to be ashamed of ourselves and to acknowledge how grievously we do offend, which scantily in the day say any short prayer at all, and yet as short as it is, full slightly ⁴⁵ cometh it from us, and as though we were half asleep.

Finally our saviour willeth us to pray, not for abundance of riches, and plenty of other worldly pleasures, nor to have hurt light on our enemies, nor to receive honour here in this world, but that we fall not into temptation; willing us therein to understand that all those worldly things be either very perilous and hurtful or else, in comparison of this one thing, very vain and foolish trifles. And therefore that thing, as the principal point that briefly implieth all the rest, did he purposely place in the end of that prayer, which long before he had taught his disciples, where he willed them to pray thus: 'And suffer us not to be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil.' ⁴⁶

'So went he his way the second time again, and made the same prayer that he did before, saying :O my Father, if this cup cannot pass from me but that I must needs drink thereof, thy will be fulfilled. And he came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy, and they wist not what answer to make him. Then he left them, and went his way again and prayed as before, and upon his knees made his prayer in this wise: O Father, if it be thy will, take away this cup from me, howbeit let thy will be done, and not mine.'

Now after he had given this advertisement unto his disciples, he got him to his prayers afresh. And albeit he desired yet once more the self-same thing that he had done before, yet in such sort framed he his request, that he referred the whole matter again to his Father's will and pleasure. Whereby giveth he us a good lesson, both heartily to pray and therewithal not to be so precise, but that we leave yet wholly unto God to do still what him list, who willeth us as much good as we can to ourselves, and a thousand fold better knoweth what is best for us.

'O my Father,' quoth he, 'if this cup may not pass from me, but that I must drink of it, thy will be fulfilled.'

In these words 'my Father' are there two things implied. For thereby doth both Christ express a great earnest affection, and declareth also, that God the Father is after a singular manner Father

unto him, not by creation only as he is to all creatures, nor by adoption as he is Father to Christian men, but is unto him as he is God his very Father by nature. By reason whereof notwithstanding he teacheth all other men to make their prayer in this wise: 'Our Father which art in Heaven,' by which words we should acknowledge that God is father unto us all and we to each other as brethren, yet doth he himself of very good reason, as he that for his godhead alonely might do so, thus speak unto the Father, and saith 'O my Father.'

Howbeit now, if any man be so high-minded that disdainng to be like other men he would seem specially to be governed by the secret spirit of God, and so to be in better case than any man is beside, verily this man in mine opinion arrogantly usurpeth these words of Christ, and in his prayer saith: 'My Father' and not 'Our Father' in that he would have it appear that the spirit of God which is common to all Christian folk were singularly in himself alone. Wherein he fareth not much unlike Lucifer, for as proudly presumeth he upon God's words as Lucifer did on his place.

Now whereas he saith: 'If this cup cannot pass from me but that I must needs drink of it, thy will be fulfilled': is declared evidently what thing Christ calleth possible, and what impossible. For that that he calleth impossible, is nothing else but the resolute and immutable ⁷ voluntary determination of his Father concerning his own death, since else, if he had perceived either by the course of the planets, or by some secret working of nature, or by destiny, that he must needs die, and thereupon had said: 'If this cup cannot pass from me but that I must needs drink thereof,' then to what purpose should he have added this: 'Thy will be fulfilled?' For why should he refer the matter unto his Father's pleasure, if he had thought, that either it had not lain in his Father's power to bring it so about or else that needs must it so have come to pass whether his Father would or no.

But now though we do all this while rehearse such words as Christ spake unto his Father to be preserved from death, and nevertheless humbly referred altogether to his will and pleasure, we must yet think always again that, seeing he was both God and man, he spake all this, not as God, but as only man. As we which be made of a body and a soul, use to speak some things of ourselves, that cannot be applied but to the soul alone, and some things speak we on the other side that can be understanden but of the body only. So say we that martyrs, as soon as they be dead, go up straightways to heaven, whereas no more goeth thither of them saving their souls alone. And likewise say we that men, how proud so ever they be here, are yet but earth and ashes, and after this short life shall lie and rot in a poor simple grave. Thus be we commonly accustomed to talk, yet never entereth the soul into the grave, nor perdy ⁸ never dieth neither, but like as if it hath lived wretchedly in the body it miserably afterward liveth in perpetual pain, so if it hath lived well, contrariwise continueth it in endless joy and bliss.

So in like manner for because, in the omnipotent person of Christ, his godhead was as well knit and joined unto his manhood, as his mortal soul was to his mortal body, therefore both that that he did as God, and also that that he did as man, as he was indeed not two persons but one, so doth he speak thereof as one. After which sort by reason of his godhead, he letted ⁹ not to say: 'I and my Father be all one.' ¹⁰ And in another place: 'Before Abraham was made I am.' ¹¹ And in respect of these two natures said he further thus: 'I am with you always even to the world's end.' ¹² And again in respect of his manhood alone, spake he these words following: 'My Father is

greater than I am.’ ⁸³ And he saith also elsewhere: ‘A little while am I with you.’ ⁸⁴ For although his glorious body is verily present with us, and so shall be ever still to the end of the world, under the form of bread in the blessed sacrament of the altar, yet his corporal figure, in which he was so long conversant with his apostles, which kind of presence he meant when he said: ‘With you am I but a small season,’ ^{lxxx} at his ascension was clearly taken away, saving at such time as it liketh him to some special person, as he sometimes doth, so to show himself. All these things therefore that Christ here in this time and place of his agony, either did, suffered, or prayed, which are so base that they may be thought far unseemly for the high majesty of his godhead; all these things, I say, let us remember that he did but only as man.

Yea, and some of them too, must we imagine to proceed from the inferior part of his manhood, that part I mean that appertaineth to the senses, whereby both then declared he himself a very man indeed, and also much relieved afterward the natural fear of other. In consideration whereof did Christ count neither any of his own foresaid words, nor anything else that in the whole process of his passion testified his humanity to have been so sore afflicted, to be any minishment of his honour at all. So far forth that he himself caused the same with all diligence to be openly set forth to the world. And albeit those things that were written by all the apostles were all equally by his own only spirit indited, yet of all the acts that ever he did, none is there to my remembrance, that he so specially willed to be recorded.

For how very heavy and sorrowful he was, that told he unto his apostles himself, to the intent they might of his mouth to other after report the same. But in what wise he made his prayer unto his Father, since they that were nearest him were a stone's cast from him, this could they not hear, all ⁸⁵ had they been waking, nor being asleep, all ^{lxxxii} had they been with him. And much less see at that time of the night, either when he fell down on his knees or when he lay grovelling on the ground. And as for that bloody sweat that streamed down all his body, all ^{lxxxiii} had they seen never so plain with their own eyes the drops thereof afterward remain in the place where he prayed, yet anything would they, trow I, sooner have conjectured than have hit so rightly upon the truth, since never was it erst ⁸⁶ heard, that ever had any man so sweat blood before.

Moreover it cannot be gathered that he then to any creature disclosed it himself, since from thenceforth until his dying hour, neither with his own mother nor with any of his apostles had he any kind of communication at all, unless anybody could reckon it likely that he should make rehearsal of the long circumstance of his bitter agony to his apostles, either when after his prayer he returned unto them and found them either fast asleep, or scant awake, at the leastwise very sleepy, or finally when the soldiers were suddenly come upon him. Then follow must it needs, and so most seemeth it to be true, that he himself after his resurrection, at what time they were clearly out of all doubt of his godhead, with his own most blessed mouth opened unto his loving mother, and dear beloved disciples, the whole history and process, which none could tell but himself alone, of the grievous agony that he had suffered in his manhood; the knowledge whereof might be right fruitful, first unto themselves and after by them to other. Great cause therefore of comfort may they take in the remembrance of this agony, that are in tribulation and heaviness, considering that our saviour himself, purposely to relieve and comfort other in their distress, of his special goodness vouchsafed to disclose that sore affliction of his own, which had he not so uttered it, had never no man known nor never could have done.

But some are there perchance which somewhat muse too, that Christ after his prayer returning to his apostles when he found them sleeping, and with his sudden coming upon them so sore abashed, that they wist not what answer to make him, so went again from them as it might seem that thither he came but of purpose to spy whether they were sleeping or waking, whereas being God, that foreknew he well enough ere ever he came at them.

Howbeit they that marvel at this, if haply any such there be, may well be answered thus. All that ever Christ did, he did upon good cause. For albeit his coming unto his apostles at that point did not so thoroughly awake them, but that either they were still so heavy, so drowsy, and so amazed that scantly could they hold up their heads and look on him; or else, which is yet somewhat worse, by his sharp words had unto them being fully awaked, nevertheless as soon as his back was turned fell straight asleep again; yet did he herein both declare his earnest care towards his disciples, and by his own example give a plain lesson beside, that from thenceforth should the heads of his Church for no sorrow, fear, or weariness, suffer their care and diligence toward their flock in any wise to slack and decay, but evermore so use themselves as it might plainly appear that they were more careful for the safeguard of their flock than for their own selves.

But here will peradventure some busybody, more inquisitive than needeth of God's high secrets, say either it was Christ's will to have his apostles watch or not. If not, why did he then so straitly command it, and if it were his will, what needed he then to go and come so often? Could not he, seeing he was God, as well make them as bid them do it?

No mastery ⁷ was it, good sir, for him being God, to have so done indeed, who did all things that him liked, and with his word made all creatures. For he spake the word, and all things were made, and by his commandment were all things created. ⁸ Could not he that caused the born blind man ⁹ to have his sight have found the means as well to open the eyes of him that was asleep? No great matter hardly had that been for him to do, all had he not been God. Since if a man do but with a needle's point prick them in their eye that be asleep, what doubt is there but that they will continue waking, and not lightly fall to sleep again, Christ could, be ye sure, have caused his apostles still to have waked, and not to have slept at all, if he had precisely and determinately willed the same. But now did he but conditionally will them so to do, that is to wit, if they were willing thereto themselves, and so fully willing too that with him both outwardly exhorting them, and by his gracious help inwardly furthering them therein, they would each man for his part put too their own good endeavour withal.

And so would he have all men saved, and no man perpetually to be damned. ¹⁰ I mean as thus, lo! if we of our own frowardness wry ¹¹ not a contrary way, but be ready obediently to follow his most blessed will and pleasure. And yet if any man of wilfulness will not let still so to do, him will not God hawse ¹² up to heaven maugre his teeth, ¹³ as though he had such need of our service there that he could not continue in his glorious kingdom without our help and assistance. Which if it so were, then many things would he punish here forthwith out of hand, which now for our weal he favourably long beareth with and winketh at, to see whether his merciful sufferance will in conclusion drive us to amendment. Which his so marvellous gentleness while we sinfully abuse, and continually heap sin upon sin, we do (as saith the apostle) lay up to our own confusion God's wrath and indignation in the day of his dreadful anger. ¹⁴ All this notwithstanding, such is the goodness of God, that for all he seeth us thus negligent, and

sluggishly sleeping upon the soft pillow of our iniquity, he stirreth us other while, he shoggeth ⁶⁵ us, and shaketh us, and by tribulation laboureth to awake us.

And whereas in this point he plainly proveth himself, for all he is displeased with us, to be nevertheless a tender, loving father unto us, yet so fond folk be we the most part of us, that we interpret it far otherwise, and this so great a benefit of his towards us account we as marvellous high displeasure. Whereas contrariwise, were we in our right wits, rather would we most earnestly entreat him, that as oft as we wander a wrong way from him, he would (draw we never so fast backward) by sharp correction maugre ⁶⁶ our mind bring us into the right way again.

For first must we pray for grace to know the way, and so say unto God with the Church: 'From blindness of heart, deliver us, O Lord.' And with the prophet also thus: 'Teach me to fulfil thy will, and shew me, O Lord, thy ways, and thoroughly instruct me in thy paths.' ⁶⁷ And secondly ought we heartily to wish, that in the fragrant odour of thy sweet savours, O God, and in the most pleasant breath of thy Holy Spirit, we may most joyfully run after thee. And if we misfortune to faint by the way (as God wot seldom do we otherwise) and like slothful losels ⁶⁸ scantily come after him a great way behind, let us forthwith say unto God: 'Take me by the right hand and lead me in thy way.' Now if we grow so feeble that we wax loath to go forth any further, and of sloth and niceness begin to stagger and to stand still, then let us make our prayer to God to draw us forward whether we will or no.

And in conclusion if after fair handling we draw still stubbornly backward and, clean contrary to God's gracious pleasure and contrary to our own wealth, continue yet unreasonably stiffnecked, like a horse and mule which have no manner of understanding, here ought we in most humble wise to beseech almighty God, with the words of the prophet well serving for this purpose: 'With a snaffle and a bridle hold hard my jaws, O God, when I do not approach towards thee.' ⁶⁹ But of truth for as much as when we once fall to slothfulness, no virtuous disposition sooner goeth from us than doth our good devotion to pray, and that loath in our prayer are we to sue for those things, be they never so behovable, ⁷⁰ that we be unwilling to receive, long before must we, even while we be well disposed, earnestly take heed, that ere ever we fall into those dangerous diseases that the unquiet mind is cumbered withal, we devoutly call upon God's help by prayer, and in most lowly wise beseech him, that if it mishap us at any time afterward, either through any lewd lust of the flesh, or through any deceitful desire of worldly things, or through the wily trains ⁷¹ of the devil, so to be overcome that we require ⁷² anything against our own wealth, he would give no care to our such requests, but keep those things that we so pray for, very far from us, and again grant us plenty of those that he foreseeeth shall be profitable unto us, make we never so much labour for the contrary.

For so are we wont all that be wise, when we look for our fit in an ague, to give them warning beforehand that shall attend on us in our sickness, that they minister nothing unto us, be we never so desirous thereof, that our disease to the hindrance of our health and to the more increase of itself in such case against all reason doth commonly covet. And therefore when we be so deadly asleep in sin that, although God of his mercy thus calleth us aloud, and shoggeth ⁷³ us, yet will we never the sooner awake, and diligently apply ourselves to virtue, oft times be we the cause ourselves that God giveth us over and leaveth us in our sins, some in such wise as he never cometh to them again. And other some suffereth he to sleep till some other season, as his

wonderful goodness and unsearchable deep wisdom seem to be more expedient. Which thing was covertly signified in that Christ, when he came the second time to his apostles, and they yet for all that would never the more watch, but needs sleep still, left them alone and went his way from them.

From *St. Thomas More's History of the Passion*, Ed. P. E. Hallett, Trans. Mary Bassett. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1941, pp. 14-45.

¹ Matt, x, 32.

² *ibid.*, 23

³ Wisdom viii, 1.

⁴ 1 Cor. x, 13.

⁵ especially.

⁵

⁶ a mild expletive, originally *par Dieu*.

⁷ 2 Tim. iv, 7.

⁸ Phil. i, 21, 23.

⁹ stratagems.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. vii, 5

¹¹ 1 Cor. ii, 3.

¹² 2 Cor. i, 8.

¹³ at once.

¹⁴ hesitated.

¹⁵ hesitated.

¹⁶ remedy against poison.

¹⁷ 1 Cor. xii, 3.

¹⁸ hindereth.

¹⁹ i.e. through fear of not being able to resist torments.

²⁰ the 'presidente' of the original is a translation of *facti sui*.

²¹ 1 Cor. x, 13.

²² Rom. viii, 18.

²³ hesitated.

²⁴ thoughtlessly.

²⁵ care.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ strut.

²⁸ especially.

²⁹ i.e. our only concern is how much remains to be said.

³⁰ even though.

³¹ troubled.

³² belch.

³³ multitude, heap.

³⁴ Matt. x, 28.

³⁵ Ps. lxii, 7.

³⁶ Ps. cxviii, 62.

³⁷ at once.
³⁸ before.
³⁹ *Par Dieu* —a mild expletive.
⁴⁰ draw.
⁴¹ neglected, delayed.
⁴² I Pet. v, 8.
⁴³ occasionally.
⁴⁴ Rastell has a marginal note: ‘Albeit these words here be St. Paul’s words (I Thess. V, 17), yet in effect did our savior say the same (Luke xviii, 1).’
⁴⁵ carelessly.
⁴⁶ Matt. vi, 13.
⁴⁷ Rastell has by mistake ‘mutable.’
⁴⁸ by God.
⁴⁹ hesitated.
⁵⁰ John x, 30.
⁵¹ John viii, 58.
⁵² Matt. xxviii, 20.
⁵³ John xiv, 28.
⁵⁴ John vii, 33.
⁵⁵ although.
⁵⁶ before.
⁵⁷ difficulty.
⁵⁸ Ps. xxxii, 9.
⁵⁹ John, ix.
⁶⁰ I Tim. ii, 4.
⁶¹ turn aside.
⁶² hoist.
⁶³ in spite of himself.
⁶⁴ Rom. ii, 4, 5.
⁶⁵ stirreth.
⁶⁶ in spite of.
⁶⁷ Ps. cxlii, 9.
⁶⁸ good-for-nothing fellows.
⁶⁹ Ps. xxxi, 9.
⁷⁰ profitable.
⁷¹ deceits.
⁷² ask.
⁷³ shaketh.