

## **THE HIGHEST SPIRITUAL LEVEL**

**that any human being can reach,**

**through God's grace received through sacraments**

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Every human being can rise up to the perfection of God, provided he/she repents and works sincerely, depending on God's grace sacramentally. At the same time, if people become careless, misusing their freedom, they will ruin themselves. Let us therefore try to understand our infinite potentialities and our duty.

### **A.) GOD WANTS US TO GROW TO PERFECTION**

- 1) The purpose of creating man in the image of God. It was to give the potentiality to grow to perfection in the image of God and to enjoy eternal bliss, that God created man in His image. "God created man in His own image, in the image of God, He created him. Male and female He created them." (Gen. 1:27). This means that the male and the female are to live together as a family and grow to perfection, as God is perfect.
- 2) What is the nature of God? "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8)
- 3) Man's duty to become perfect. After speaking about the love of the heavenly Father, for the evil and unjust, Jesus Christ has commanded us to become perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. "You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (St. Matt. 5:48). He has also asked us to love one another as He has loved us, "This is my commandment that you love one another, as I have loved you." (St. Jn. 15:12). St. Paul says that it is our duty to become exactly like Jesus Christ, "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way, into him who is the head, into Christ." (Eph. 4:15). "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness, from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (II Cor. 3:18)
- 4) Our Lord offered Himself as a sacrifice to make the church His bride. Jesus Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice, in order that the Church may become a glorious bride. St. Paul says, "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:26, 27). "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the

two shall become one flesh. This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31, 32).

- 5) Since man fell into sin, God is working unceasingly for our salvation. God is speaking through prophet Jeremiah as follows, “I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.” (Jer. 32: 40, 41). We cannot even imagine a love higher than this. God putting His Spirit on His servant, is always at work guiding us and strengthening us. “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen; in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law” (Is. 42:1-4).

### **B.) HOW FAR SHOULD WE BE THANKFUL TO GOD AND LOVE HIM?**

- 1) Our duty to be thankful to God. Let us see how much we should be thankful to God for His countless blessings, without which we cannot even survive. It is to be noted that God is blessing us inspite of our unworthiness. The air that we breathe, the water that we drink, and the food that we eat, are given by God. The sun-light given by God is also essential for our existence. The chlorophyll in plants makes starch using sun-light. Sun-light is necessary to enable us to see things, to avoid dangers and to work. There are so many other things in nature which make life most attractive and enjoyable. There can be no limit to our thankfulness for the intelligence, without which none is able to make scientific equipments. Should we not be thankful to God for the wonderful and autonomous working of the body? Should we not be thankful for the moral sense given by God, which enables us to distinguish between good and bad? Should we not be thankful to God for our redemption from sin, through the incarnation and sacrifice of our Lord? Should we not be thankful for the Holy Spirit, who helps us to have faith, to repent, to pray, and to have self-control, humility, love and rebirth? We must be thankful to God for all the good things we receive from His children. Should we not be thankful for all the blessings that we receive through sacraments? St. Paul says that it is in God that we live, move and have our being. (Acts. 17:28) Above all, should we not be thankful for the promise of eternal life in the other world for everyone including the poor, the sick, the suffering, and the handicapped. There is no suffering in heaven. The psalmist is asking “What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me”? (Ps. 116:12). Should we not be filled with thankfulness and dedicate ourselves to a life pleasing to God and bring glory to Him, in every way, following what prophet Isaiah says

about the Lord's servant in Is. 42:1-4? St. Paul says, "If we live we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord".(Rom.14:8)

- 2) How to express our thankfulness to God? We should lead a godly life which will bring glory to God. Such a life is pleasing to Him. Godly life is a life full of love, humility and holiness. Our Lord said "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (St. Matt. 5:16) Nothing other than a godly life, can be the true expressions of thankfulness to God.

Acquiring money through illegal ways and giving a portion to God and charitable purposes is not the right way to express our thanks. Acquiring money through illegal ways is a sin and such sins cannot be purged by giving money to God and charities.

- 3) How can we develop real love for others? There are mainly two ways to foster love for others:

a) See everyone as a child of God, to whom we owe everything in our unworthiness. Then we will be able to do everything as if to God. St. Paul says "whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not man" (Col. 3:23).

b) See everyone as a fellow being like ourselves. Then we can help, forgive, respect and obey whole-heartedly. Then we will be able to obey our Lord who says "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (St. Matt. 7:12).

Sree Buddha, the great philosopher of India, says "hatred cannot be won by hatred, but by love".

Should we not love our enemies as our Lord asks us to love them, after loving His enemies?

- 4) The mystery of suffering. The suffering of the innocent is a mystery. There are three kinds of sufferings 1) The sufferings that we bring upon ourselves through our selfishness and foolishness. 2) The sufferings caused by others through their selfishness and revenge? 3) Sufferings that come from nature. These sufferings affect all the good and the bad. We don't know why suffering comes to some people while others are spared. Whatever be the cause of suffering, we must know that God can bring good out of suffering. St. Paul says that his suffering was not taken away, in order to keep him from being too elated by the abundance of the revelations (2 Cor. 12:7). The psalmist says "It is good for me that I was afflicted that I may learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71). It is said about our Lord that He was perfected in obedience through His sufferings (Heb. 5:8).

We can hope that those who suffer in this world, will have a higher blessing in heaven. See how Lazarus who was at the gate of the rich man, was taken to Abraham's bosom in paradise (St. Lk. 16:22). We must be thankful to God for bringing good out of suffering. We should surrender to God's will, with the hope that God will bring good out of suffering.

- 5) God will not force anyone to do anything. Hence man should cooperate with God and submit to His will. Our Lord says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one

hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” (Rev. 3:20) If God is going to force us to do things, we will become mere robots and there will not be any heaven.

### **C.) THE NEED OF SACRAMENTS**

- 1) Everyone has to start a new spiritual life through baptism. The first step in Christian life is Holy Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and rebirth. Our Lord says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God....Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” (St. Jn. 3: 3-5). After baptism everyone should lead a dedicated life.

To the baptized, St. Paul says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Rom. 6:3-5). “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you, fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, Barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” (Col. 3:5-13). Our Lord speaks about daily dedication as follows: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (St. Lk. 9:23).

Holy Confession and Holy Qurbana are necessary for a continued dedicated life and the renewal of our Lord’s indwelling in us.

Our Lord has given the authority to forgive sins to the disciples. Our Lord breathed on the disciples and said “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (St. Jn. 20:23)

Our Lord has said “Truly truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.” (St. Jn. 6:53, 54)

2). Only the sinless Lord can save us from sin and help us to grow.

Our Lord asks, “which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? (St. Jn. 8:46) This shows that Jesus Christ is free from sins of commission. He says, “I always do the things pleasing to Him (the heavenly father) (St. Jn. 8:29). This shows that our Lord is free from sins of omission. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews says, “For we do not have a high-priest, who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect, has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). St. Peter speaks about the saving works of the resurrected Lord as follows. “God having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you, in turning everyone of you, from your wickedness. (Acts. 3:26)

Our Lord says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing.” (St. Jn. 15:5). The resurrected Lord is beyond time and space. He can be with everyone as if there is nobody else.

3) How to renew our Lord’s indwelling in our hearts?

In order that our Lord may continue to abide in us, we have to do two things:

- a) We have to receive our Lord into us afresh through Holy Qurbana (Eucharist). See St. Jn. 6:53-54.
- b) We must love God and obey His commandments. "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (St. Jn. 14:23).

4) The love of Christ should prompt us to love Him. St. Paul says, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live, might live no longer for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised. “ (II Cor. 5:14,15)

5) The Holy Spirit helps us in our spiritual growth. St. Paul says, “God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

(Rom. 5:5). When we pray for love and try to do deeds of love, the Holy Spirit will fill us with love.

### **D.) REDEMPTION FROM ALL SINS UP TO THE VERY END**

- 1) Salvation is for everyone. God wants to give salvation to everyone. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (St. Jn. 3:16). Our Lord speaks about the good shepherd who goes out in search of the one sheep that was lost. This shows the love of God for every individual.
- 2) God will save everyone in all kinds of situations. God will save all sinners, the poor, the sick the handicapped and the foolish, provided they repent and come to God. Our Lord says, “Him who comes to me, I will not cast out.” (St. Jn. 6:37). Prophet Ezekiel speaks of the acceptance of all who repent “But if a wicked man turns away from his sins which he has committed, and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die” (Ezek. 18:21). See how the criminal on the cross was saved at the last moment, when he repented. All that is required from our part is only repentance and dedication.
- 3) When we become perfect, God will make us sit where He is sitting Our Lord says, “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.” (St. Jn. 14:1-3) This is the highest spiritual level that is promised to us.
- 4) No-body on earth can claim that he/she is completely saved. Note what St. Paul has to say about himself, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God, in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:12-14).
- 5) We must be free from all sins without exception. St. James says, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point, has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery’, said also, ‘Do not kill.’ If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law.” (St. James 2:10,11). One disease is enough to have pain and death. This is true in spiritual life also. We must be free from all sins without exception, in order to enjoy heavenly bliss.
- 6) “He who endures to the end, will be saved” (St. Mk. 13:13) John Bunyan in his book “Pilgrim’s Progress” speaks of the pilgrim coming up to the gates of heaven. From there the pilgrim found a way. The pilgrim asked where that way was leading to. The

reply he received was “hell.” This shows that even from the gates of heaven, there is a way to hell. That means that we must be vigilant till we enter heaven itself. Prophet Ezekiel says the same “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and does the same abominable things that a wicked man does, shall he live? (Ezek. 18:24)

### **E.) GOD’S AGONY**

- 1) Till we all reach perfection, God is having a painful heart. Here we means the whole mankind including saints also. That is the reason why we pray for St. Mary, the apostles, the martyrs also, along and with our request to pray for us. Since God is love, He must be identifying Himself with everyone. Then the ruin of everyone will be experienced by God as His own. The agony of our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, is an example for this. Our Lord said, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death” (St. Matt. 26:38). At that time Judas Iscariot was on the way to betray our Lord. Before this our Lord was weeping over Jerusalem when He was entering the city in triumph. “And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it.” (St. Lk. 19:41). God expressed His agony over the sinners as we find in the prophecy of Hosea, “How can I give you up, O E'phraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel!... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender.” (Hos. 11:8). At the gate of Damascus our Lord said to Saul (later Paul) “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” (Acts 9:5) God is appealing to our hearts with deep sorrow.
  
- 2) It is our duty to attain perfection and render comfort to God. Realizing the depth of God’s love and pain, we have to love Him with the whole of our heart, soul, mind and strength. (St. Mk. 12-30) Our Lord says “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (St. Mt. 5:16)

Our love must be whole-hearted, sacrificial and unconditional. Filled with the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control) we have to become the glorious bride of Christ. There is a saying, “Doctor furnishes the conditions, God heals.” In a similar way, when we furnish the conditions through God’s help, God will grant us perfection. At the same time, we must help others to repent and grow to perfection.

## **CONCLUSION**

What should be our final goal? Our final goal in eternity, should be to become one with God. Our Lord prayed to the heavenly Father on the eve of His death, as follows. “I do not pray for them only, but for those who believe in me, through their word, that they may all be one, even as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (St. Jn. 17:20, 21).

The future of the world depends on what every individual is doing every moment, both for the good and the bad. Our Lord says “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” (St. Lk. 15:7) Let us then pray earnestly and work unceasingly, so that everyone may ultimately repent and grow to perfection in the image of God, for His glory. “How shall we escape, if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3)