

# **THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

## **Faith and Hope.**

**By Saint Alphonsus Liguori.**

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### **Faith.**

#### **CHARITY BELIEVES ALL THINGS.**

(Charitas omnia credit.)

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He that loves Jesus Christ believes all His Words. (Faith.)

WHOEVER loves a person, believes all that proceeds from the lips of that person; consequently, the more a soul loves Jesus Christ, the more lively and unshaken is her faith. When the good thief beheld our Redeemer, though He had done no ill, suffering death upon the Cross with such patience, he began at once to love Him; under the influence of this love, and of the Divine light which then broke upon his soul, he believed that this was truly the Son of God, and begged not to be forgotten by Him when He should have passed into His kingdom.

Faith is the foundation of charity; but faith afterwards receives its perfection from charity. His faith is most perfect whose love of God is most perfect. Charity produces in man not merely the faith of the understanding, but the faith of the will also: those who believe only with the understanding, but not with the will, as is the case with sinners who are perfectly convinced of the truths of the faith, but do not choose to live according to the Divine Commandments, — such as these have a very weak faith; for had they a more lively belief that the grace of God is a priceless treasure, and that sin, because it robs us of this grace, is the worst of evils, they would assuredly change their lives. If, then, they prefer the miserable creatures of this earth to God, it is because they either do not believe, or because their faith is very weak. On the contrary, he who believes not only with the understanding, but also with the will, so that he not only believes, but has the will to believe in God, the revealer of truth, from the love he has for Him, and rejoices in so believing, — such a one has a perfect faith, and consequently seeks to make his life conformable to the truths that he believes.

Weakness of faith, however, in those who live in sin, does not spring from the obscurity of faith;

for though God, in order to make our faith more meritorious, has veiled the objects of faith in darkness and secrecy, He has at the same time given us so clear and convincing evidence of their truth, that not to believe them would argue not merely a lack of sense, but sheer madness and impiety. The weakness of the faith of many persons is to be traced to their wickedness of living. He who, rather than forego the enjoyment of forbidden pleasures, scorns the Divine friendship, would wish there were no law to forbid, and no chastisement to punish, his sin; on this account he strives to blind himself to the eternal truths of death, judgment, and Hell, and of Divine justice; and because such subjects strike too much terror into his heart, and are too apt to mix bitterness in his cup of pleasure, he sets his brain to work to discover proofs, which have at least the look of plausibility; and by which he allows himself to be flattered into the persuasion that there is no soul, no God, no Hell, in order that he may live and die like the brute beasts, without laws and without reason.

And this laxity of morals is the source whence have issued, and still issue daily, so many books and systems of Materialists, Indifferentists, Politicists, Deists, and Naturalists; some among them deny the Divine existence, and some the Divine Providence, saying that God, after having created men, takes no further notice of them, and is heedless whether they love or hate Him, whether they be saved or lost; others, again, deny the goodness of God, and maintain that He has created numberless souls for Hell, becoming Himself their tempter to sin, that so they may damn themselves, and go into everlasting fire, to curse Him there forever.

Oh, ingratitude and wickedness of men! God has created them in His mercy, to make them eternally happy in Heaven; He has poured on them so many lights, benefits, and graces, to bring them to eternal life; for the same end He has redeemed them at the price of so many sorrows and sufferings; and yet they strive to deny all, that they may give free rein to their vicious inclinations! But no: let them strive as they will, the unhappy beings cannot wrest themselves from remorse of conscience, and the dread of the Divine vengeance. On this subject I have latterly published a work, entitled *The Truth of Faith*, in which I have clearly shown the inconsistency of all these systems of modern unbelievers. Oh, if they would but once forsake sin, and apply themselves earnestly to the love of Jesus Christ, they would then most certainly cast away all doubts about things of faith, and firmly believe all the truths that God has revealed!

The true lover of Jesus Christ keeps the eternal truths constantly in view, and orders all his actions according to them. Oh, how thoroughly does he who loves Jesus Christ understand the force of that saying of the Wise Man, Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity; [Ecclesiastes 1:2.] that all earthly greatness is mere smoke, dirt, and delusion; that the soul's only welfare and happiness consists in loving its Creator, and in doing His blessed will; that we are, in reality, no more than what we are before God; that it is of no use to gain the whole world, if the soul be lost; that all the goods in the world can never satisfy the human heart, but only God Himself; and, in fine, that we must leave all in order to gain all.

Charity believes all things. There are other Christians, though not so perverse as the class we have mentioned, who would fain believe in nothing, that they may give full scope to their unruly passions, and live on undisturbed by the stings of remorse, — there are others, I say, who believe, indeed, but their faith is languid; they believe the most holy mysteries of religion, the truths of

Revelation contained in the Gospel, including the Trinity, the Redemption, the holy Sacraments, and the rest; still they do not believe all Jesus Christ has said: Blessed are the poor; blessed are the sorrowful; blessed are the mortified; blessed are those whom men persecute, calumniate, and curse. Blessed are the poor; blessed are they that hunger; blessed are they that suffer persecution; blessed are you when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you. [Matthew 5:3-11.] This is the teaching of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. How, then, can it be said, that those believe in the Gospel who say: "Blessed are those who have money; blessed are those who suffer nothing; blessed are those who can take their amusements; pitiable is the man that suffers persecution and ill-treatment from others"? We must certainly say of such as these, that either they do not believe the Gospel, or that they believe only a part of it. He who believes it all esteems it his highest fortune, and a mark of the Divine favor in this world, to be poor, to be sick, to be mortified, to be despised and ill-treated by men. Such is the belief, and such the language, of one who believes all that is said in the Gospel, and has a real love for Jesus Christ.

### **Affections and Prayers.**

My beloved Redeemer, O life of my soul, I firmly believe that You are the only good worthy of being loved. I believe that You are the greatest lover of my soul, since through love alone You did die, overwhelmed with sorrows for love of me. I believe there is no greater blessing in this world, or in the next, than to love You, and to do Your adorable will. All this I believe most firmly; so that I renounce all things, that I may belong wholly to You, and that I may possess You alone. Help me, through the merits of Your sacred Passion, and make me such as You would have me to be. I believe in You, O infallible truth! I trust in You, O infinite mercy! I love You, O infinite goodness! O infinite love, I give myself wholly to You, Who have wholly given Yourself to me in Your Passion, and in the holy Sacrament of the Altar.

And I recommend myself to you, *O Mary, refuge of sinners*, and Mother of God!

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## **HOPE.**

### **CHARITY HOPES ALL THINGS.**

(Charitas omnia sperat.)

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He that loves Jesus Christ hopes for all Things from Him. (Hope.)

HOPE increases charity, and charity increases hope. Hope in the Divine goodness undoubtedly gives an increase to our love of Jesus Christ. Saint Thomas says, that in the very moment when we hope to receive some benefit from a person, we begin also to love him. [*Summa*, First Part of the Second Part, question 40, article 7.] On this account, the Lord forbids us to put our trust in creatures: 'Put not your trust in princes'. [Psalm 146:3 in the Hebrew or Psalm 145:2 in the

Vulgate.] Further, He pronounces a curse on those who do so: ‘Cursed be the man that trusts in man’. [Jeremiah 27:5.]

God does not wish us to trust in creatures, because He does not wish us to fix our love upon them. Hence, Saint Vincent of Paul said: "Let us beware of reposing too much confidence in men; for when God beholds us thus leaning on them for support, He Himself withdraws from us." On the other hand, the more we trust in God, the more we shall advance in His holy love: ‘I have run the way of Your Commandments, when You did enlarge my heart’. [Psalm 119:32 in the Hebrew or Psalm 118:32 in the Vulgate.] Oh, how rapidly does that soul advance in perfection that has her heart dilated with confidence in God! She flies rather than runs; for by making God the foundation of all her hope, she flings aside her own weakness, and borrows the strength of God Himself, which is communicated to all who place their confidence in Him: ‘They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. [Isaiah 40:31.] The eagle is the bird that soars nearest the sun; in like manner, the soul that has God for her trust becomes detached from the earth, and more and more united to God by love.

Now as hope increases the love of God, so does love help to increase hope; for charity makes us the adopted sons of God. In the natural order, we are the work of His hands; but in the supernatural order we are made sons of God, and partakers of the Divine nature, through the merits of Jesus Christ; as the Apostle Saint Peter writes: ‘That by these you may be made partakers of the Divine nature’. [2 Peter 1:4.] And if charity makes us the sons of God, it consequently makes us heirs of Heaven, according to Saint Paul: And if sons, heirs also. [Romans 8:17.] Now a son claims the right of abiding under the paternal roof; an heir is entitled to the property; and thus charity increases the hope of Paradise: so that the souls that love God, cry out incessantly, "Your kingdom come, Your kingdom come!" Moreover, God loves those who love Him: ‘I love them that love Me’. [Proverbs 8:17.] He showers down His graces on those that seek Him by love: ‘The Lord is good to the soul that seeks Him’. [Lamentations 3:25.] Consequently, the soul that loves God most has the greatest hope in His goodness. This confidence produces that imperturbable tranquility in the Saints which makes them always joyful and full of peace, even amid the severest trials; for their love of Jesus Christ, and their persuasion of His liberality towards those who love Him, leads them to trust solely in Him; and thus they find a lasting repose.

The sacred spouse abounded with delights, because she loved none but her Spouse, and leaned entirely on Him for support; she was full of contentment, since she well knew how generous her beloved is towards all that love Him; so that of her it is written: ‘Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved?’ [Canticles 8:5.] These words of the Wise Man are most true: ‘All good things come to me together with her’. [Wisdom 7:11.] With charity, all blessings are introduced into the soul.

The primary object of Christian hope is God, Whom the soul enjoys in the kingdom of Heaven. But we must not suppose that the hope of enjoying God in Paradise is any obstacle to charity; since the hope of Paradise is inseparably connected with charity, which there receives its full and complete perfection. Charity is that infinite treasure, spoken of by the Wise Man, which makes us

the friends of God: 'An infinite treasure to men, which they that use, become the friends of God'. [Wisdom 7:14.] The angelic Doctor Saint Thomas says, that friendship is founded on the mutual communication of goods; for as friendship is nothing more than a mutual love between friends, it follows that there must be a reciprocal interchange of the good which each possesses. [*Summa*, First Part of the Second Part, question 65, article 5.] Hence, the Saint says: "If there be no communication, there is no friendship." On this account, Jesus Christ says to His disciples: 'I have called you friends, because all things whatsoever I have heard of My Father I have made known to you'. [John, 15:15.]

Since He had made them His friends, He had communicated all His secrets to them. Saint Francis de Sales says: "If, by a supposition of what is impossible, there could be an infinite good (that is a God) to Whom we belonged in no way whatever, and with Whom we could have no union or communication, we should certainly esteem Him more than ourselves; so that we might feel great desire of being able to love Him; but we should not actually love Him, because love is built upon union; for love is a friendship, and the foundation of friendship is to have things in common; and its end is union." [*Love of God*, Book 10, chapter 10.] Thus, Saint Thomas teaches us that charity does not exclude the desire of the reward prepared for us in Heaven by Almighty God. On the contrary, it makes us look to it, as the chief object of our love, for such is God, Who constitutes the bliss of Paradise; for friendship implies, that friends rejoice with one another.

The Spouse in the Canticles refers to this reciprocal interchange of goods, when she says: 'My Beloved to me and I to Him. [Canticles 2:16.] In Heaven, the soul belongs wholly to God, and God belongs wholly to the soul, according to the measure of her capacity and of her merits. But from the persuasion which the soul has of her own nothingness in comparison with the infinite attractions of Almighty God, and aware consequently that the claims of God on her love are beyond measure greater than her own can be on the love of God, she is therefore more anxious to procure the Divine pleasure than her own enjoyment; so that she is more gratified by the pleasure which she affords Almighty God by giving herself entirely to Him, than by God's giving Himself entirely to her; but at the same time she is delighted when God thus gives Himself to her, inasmuch as she is thereby animated to give herself up to God with a greater intensity of love. She indeed rejoices at the glory which God imparts to her, but for the sole purpose of referring it back to God Himself, and of thus doing her utmost to increase the Divine glory. At the sight of God in Heaven the soul cannot help loving Him with all her strength; on the other hand, God cannot hate anyone that loves Him: but if (supposing what is impossible) God could hate a soul that loves Him, and if a beatified soul could exist without loving God, she would much rather endure all the pains of Hell, on condition of being allowed to love God as much as He should hate her, than to live without loving God, even though she could enjoy all the other delights of Paradise. So it is; for that conviction which the soul has of God's boundless claims upon her love gives her a greater desire to love God than to be loved by Him.

Charity hopes all things. Saint Thomas, with the Master of the Sentences (Peter Lombard), defines Christian hope to be a "sure expectation of eternal happiness." [*On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Book of Sentences*, discourse 26.] Its certainty arises from the infallible promise of God to give eternal life to His faithful servants. Now charity, by taking away sin, at the same time takes away all obstacles to our

obtaining the happiness of the blessed; hence the greater our charity, the greater also and firmer is our hope. Hope, on the other hand, can in no way interfere with the purity of love, because, according to the observation of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, love tends naturally to union with the object beloved; or, as Saint Augustine asserts in stronger terms, love itself is like a chain of gold that links together the hearts of the lover and the loved. "Love is as it were a kind of bond uniting two together." [*On the Trinity* Volume 8, chapter 10.] And as this union can never be effected at a distance, the person that loves always longs for the presence of the object of his love. The sacred spouse languished in the absence of her beloved, and entreated her companions to acquaint Him with her sorrow, that He might come and console her with His Presence: 'I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, that you tell Him that I languish with love'. [Canticles 5:8.] A soul that loves Jesus Christ exceedingly cannot but desire and hope, as long as she remains on earth, to go without delay and be united to her beloved Lord in Heaven.

Thus we see that the desire to go and see God in Heaven, not so much for the delight which we shall experience in loving God, as for the pleasure which we shall afford God by loving Him, is pure and perfect love. Nor is the joy of the blessed in Heaven any hindrance to the purity of their love; such joy is inseparable from their love; but they take far more satisfaction in their love of God than in the joy that it affords them. Some one will perhaps say: But the desire of a reward is rather a love of concupiscence than a love of friendship. We must therefore make a distinction between temporal rewards promised by men and the eternal rewards of Paradise promised by God to those who love Him: the rewards given by man are distinct from their own persons and independent of them, since they do not bestow themselves, but only their goods, when they would remunerate others; on the contrary, the principal reward which God gives to the blessed is the gift of Himself: 'I am your reward exceeding great'. [Genesis 15:1.] Hence, to desire Heaven is the same thing as to desire God, Who is our last end.

I wish here to propose a doubt, which may rise in the mind of one who loves God, and strives to conform himself in all things to His blessed will. If it should be ever revealed to such a one that he would be eternally lost, would he be obliged to bow to it with resignation, in order to practice conformity with the will of God? Saint Thomas says no; and further, that he would sin by consenting to it, because he would be consenting to live in a state that involves sin, and is contrary to the last end for which God created him; for God did not create souls to hate Him in Hell, but to love Him in Heaven: so that He does not wish the death even of the sinner, but that all should be converted and saved. The holy Doctor says that God wishes no one to be damned except through sin; and therefore, a person, by consenting to his damnation, would not be acting in conformity with the will of God, but with the will of sin. [*De Veritas* question 23, article 8.] But suppose that God, foreseeing the sin of a person, should have decreed his damnation, and that this decree should be revealed to him, would he be bound to consent to it? In the same passage, the Saint says, By no means; because such a revelation must not be taken as an irrevocable decree, but made merely by way of communication, as a threat of what would follow if he persists in sin.

But let everyone banish such baneful thoughts from his mind, as only calculated to cool his confidence and love. Let us love Jesus Christ as much as possible here below; let us always be sighing to go hence and to behold Him in Paradise, that we may there love Him perfectly; let us make it the grand object of all our hopes, to go thither to love Him with all our strength. We are

commanded even in this life to love God with our whole strength: 'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your strength'; [Luke, 10:27] but the angelical Doctor [*On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Book of Sentences*, discourse 27] says that man cannot perfectly fulfill this precept upon earth; only Jesus Christ, Who was both God and Man, and the most holy Mary, who was full of grace and free from Original Sin, perfectly fulfilled it. But we miserable children of Adam, infected as we are with sin, can not love God without some imperfection; and it is in Heaven alone, when we shall see God face to face, that we shall love Him, nay more, that we shall be necessitated to love Him with all our strength.

Behold, then, the scope of all our desires and aspirations, of all our thoughts and ardent hopes; to go and enjoy God in Heaven, in order to love Him with all our strength, and to rejoice in the enjoyment of God. The blessed certainly rejoice in their own felicity in that kingdom of delights; but the chief source of their happiness, and that which absorbs all the rest, is to know that their beloved Lord possesses an infinite happiness; for they love God incomparably more than themselves. Each one of the blessed has such a love for Him, that he would willingly forfeit all happiness, and undergo the most cruel torments, rather than that God should lose (if it were possible for Him to lose) one, even the least particle of His happiness. Hence, the sight of God's infinite happiness, and the knowledge that it can never suffer diminution for all eternity, constitutes his Paradise. This is the meaning of what our Lord says to every soul on whom He bestows the possession of eternal glory: 'Enter into the joy of your Lord'. [Matthew 25 21.] It is not the joy that enters into the blessed soul, but the soul that enters into the joy of God, since the joy of God is the object of the joy of the blessed. Thus, the good of God will be the good of the blessed; the riches of God will be their riches, and the happiness of God will be their happiness.

On the instant that a soul enters Heaven, and sees by the light of glory the infinite beauty of God face to face, she is at once seized and all consumed with love. The happy soul is then as it were lost and immersed in that boundless ocean of the goodness of God. Then it is that she quite forgets herself, and inebriated with Divine love, thinks only of loving her God: 'They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Your House'. [Psalm 36:8 in the Hebrew or Psalm 35:9 in the Vulgate.] As an intoxicated person no longer thinks of himself, so a soul in bliss can only think of loving and affording delight to her beloved Lord; she desires to possess Him entirely, and she does in fact possess Him, without fear of losing Him any more; she desires to give herself wholly to Him, at every moment, and she does indeed possess Him for every moment; she offers herself to God without reserve, and God receives her in His loving embraces, and so holds her, and shall hold her in the same fond embraces for all eternity.

In this manner the soul is wholly united to God in Heaven, and loves Him with all her strength; her love is most perfect and complete, and though necessarily finite, since a creature is not capable of infinite love, it nevertheless renders her perfectly happy and contented, so that she desires nothing more. On the other hand, Almighty God communicates Himself, and unites Himself wholly to the soul, filling her with Himself proportionately to her merits; and this union is not merely by means only of His gifts, lights, and loving attractions, as is the case during the present life, but by His Own very essence. As fire penetrates iron, and seems to change it into itself, so does God penetrate the soul and fill her with Himself; and though she never loses her own being, yet she becomes so penetrated and absorbed by that immense ocean of the Divine substance, that

she remains, as it were, annihilated, and as if she ceased to exist. The Apostle prayed for this happy lot for His disciples when He said: 'That you may be filled unto all the fullness of God'. [Ephesians 3:19.]

And this is the last end, which the goodness of God has appointed for us in the life to come. Hence, the soul can never enjoy perfect repose on earth; because it is only in Heaven that she can obtain perfect union with God. It is true that the lovers of Jesus Christ find peace in the practice of perfect conformity with the will of God; but they cannot in this life find complete repose; this is only obtained when our last end is obtained; that is, when we see God face to face, and are consumed with His Divine love; and as long as the soul does not reach this end, she is ill at ease, and groans and sighs, saying: 'Behold, in peace is my bitterness most bitter. [Isaiah 38:17.] Yes, O my God, I live in peace in this valley of tears, because such is Your will; but I cannot help feeling unspeakable bitterness at finding myself at a distance from You, and not yet perfectly united with You, Who are my centre, my all, and the fullness of my repose!

For this reason the Saints, though they were all inflamed with the love of God, did nothing but sigh after Paradise. David cried out: 'Woe is me, that my sojourning is prolonged!' [Psalm 120:5 in the Hebrew or Psalm 119:5 in the Vulgate.] 'I shall be satisfied when your glory shall appear. [Psalm 17:15 in the Hebrew or Psalm 16:15 in the Vulgate.] Saint Paul said of himself: 'Having a desire to be with Christ'. [Philippians 1:23.] Saint Francis of Assisi said:

"I look for such a mead of bliss,  
That all my pain seems happiness." [*Apophthegmata* (Sayings) 57.]

These were all so many acts of perfect charity, The angelic Doctor teaches us, that the highest degree of charity that a soul can reach upon earth, is to desire intensely to go and be united with God, and to enjoy Him in Heaven. [*Summa*, Second Part of the Second Part, question 24, article 9.] But, as we have already seen, this enjoyment of God in Heaven does not consist so much in the fruition of the delights there lavished on her by Almighty God, as in the pleasure she takes in the happiness of God Himself, Whom she loves incomparably more than herself.

The Holy Souls in Purgatory feel no pain more acutely than that of their yearning to possess God, from Whom they remain still at a distance. And this sort of pain will afflict those especially who in their lifetime had but little desire of Paradise. Cardinal [Saint Robert] Bellarmine [*On Purgatory* volume 1, Part 2, chapter 7.] also says, that there is a certain place in Purgatory called, 'prison of honor,' where certain souls are not tormented with any pain of sense, but merely with the pain of privation of the sight of God; examples of this are related by Saint Gregory, Venerable (Saint) Bede, Saint Vincent Ferrer, and Saint Bridget; and this punishment is not for the commission of sin, but for coldness in desiring Heaven. Many souls aspire to perfection; but for the rest, they are too indifferent whether they go to enjoy the sight of God, or continue on earth. But eternal life is an inestimable good, that has been purchased by the death of Jesus Christ; and God punishes such souls as have been remiss during life in their desires to obtain it.

### **Affections and Prayers.**

O God, my Creator and my Redeemer, You have created me for Heaven; You have redeemed me from Hell to bring me into Heaven; and I have so many times, in Your very face, renounced my

claim to Heaven by my sins, and have remained contented in seeing myself doomed to Hell! But blessed forever be Your infinite mercy, which, I would fain hope, has pardoned me, and many a time rescued me from perdition. Ah, my Jesus, would that I had never offended You! Would that I had always loved You! I am glad that at least I have still time to do so. I love You! O love of my soul, I love You with my whole heart; I love You more than myself! I see plainly that You wish to save me, that I may be able to love You for all eternity in that kingdom of love. I thank You, and beseech You to help me for the remainder of my life, in which I wish to love You most ardently, that I may ardently love You in eternity. Ah, my Jesus, when will the day arrive that shall free me from all danger of losing You, that shall consume me with love, by unveiling before my eyes Your infinite beauty, so that I shall be under the necessity of loving You? Oh, sweet necessity! Oh, happy and dear and most desired necessity, which shall relieve me from all fear of ever more displeasing You, and shall oblige me to love You with all my strength! My conscience alarms me, and says: "How can you presume to enter Heaven?" But, my dearest Redeemer, Your merits are all my hope.

O Mary, *Queen of Heaven*, your intercession is all-powerful with God, and in you, I put my trust!

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