

CHAPTER III

DIFFERENT WAYS OF ATTENDING TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD

#1 BY MULTIPLIED REFLECTIONS: REFLECTIONS MADE ON THE PRESENCE GOD SHOULD BE BASED ON ONLY ONE OF THE WAYS OF CONSIDERING GOD PRESENT

- 84** When we place ourselves in the presence of God following one of the ways suggested above, it is important that the reflections we make should all refer to the same way, and should all tend to the same end. For, besides the fact that this practice helps to control the mind and teaches it to reason correctly, it also contributes greatly to keeping the soul in a recollected state, and gives it more facility for occupying itself for a longer time and in a more interior manner with the presence of God.
- 85** Whereas, if one allows the mind to make a reflection on one manner, and then on a different one, the mind is taken up with different thoughts and making different reflections which have no connection with each other; it remains in a sort of dissipated state, and cannot succeed in reflecting and thinking correctly. And the soul by this manner of making reflections loses its capacity for interior recollection.
- 86** Suppose that, for instance, we make a few reflections on the way of placing ourselves in God's presence, considering Him in the place where we are; and that we place ourselves in God's presence considering Him present within ourselves as in His temple. This second consideration is out of place at this point, because these two ways of placing ourselves in God's presence are not suitable to each other, since each one has a different purpose. For the purpose of the first way is to lead us to keep ourselves recollected wherever we may be,

because of God's presence.
And the purpose of the other way
is to help us preserve great purity of heart
because we are the temples of God.
Or we may, in this second way, have this other purpose
of adoring God dwelling in our heart,
or some other purpose that is related to this second
way.

#2 BY SHORT AND PROLONGED REFLECTIONS: HOW TO MAINTAIN OURSELVES IN THE HOLY PRESENCE OF GOD BY RECALLING PASSAGES OF HOLY SCRIP- TURE, AND THE REFLECTIONS THAT CAN BE MADE ON SUCH PASSAGES

87 These six ways of placing ourselves in the presence of God
should help the soul maintain this awareness
for some time during mental prayer.
but it can be said
that they make us aware of God's presence
only in a passing manner
and as it were, external to the soul,
because they lead us to recognize the presence of God
only through reasoning and multiple reflections;
which, with respect to truths of faith,
darken the mind rather than enlighten it
and shut it up rather than open it,
to a deeper understanding of the sacred
mysteries which these truths contain,
and keep the soul away from God instead of drawing it
closer to Him;
unless these reasonings and reflections
are based on and supported by views of faith.

88 An easier means for making us more deeply aware of the
presence of God,
in an interior manner,
is to recall some passage of Holy Scripture
which reminds us of the presence of God,
as for example this one in Psalm 15:8.
I intend to keep God always before me.

Ps 16,8

Then we reflect on this passage
without much reasoning
because reasoning destroys faith,
or at least introduces obstacles which diminish it
and keeps it from being as lively as it might be,
and prevents it from being firmly fixed
in our mind and our heart.

89 We might make the following reflection on this passage:

What a joy it is
for our souls to be constantly occupied
with the presence of God!
This is an anticipation of the happiness of
heaven.

cf. Ps 16,8

Then we remain for as long a time as we can,
in an attention at once simple
and at the same time, as lively as possible,
on this passage.

This reflection is not encumbered with reasoning.

90 The grasp that the mind has of it, and the attention it
pays to it
not only does not hinder
but does not even distract our attention
from the passage,

which, being of faith,
causes the mind to be imbued with this truth;
and the understanding it has of it becomes so clear
that it cannot help adoring it in God and outside
of God

as something that came forth the mouth of God
as it were, and according to our human way of
expressing ourselves.

cf. Mt 4,4

91 When considering such things
we must not let the mind grow fatigued,
as might happen sometimes,
especially when one is just beginning to apply oneself
to mental prayer,
for fear that
the mind, not yet accustomed to this and not having
acquired much facility,
may grow disgusted.

92 So, when we find that we cannot occupy ourselves any longer
with this passage,

by means of the reflection we made on it,
we should turn our mind to another reflection,
which, since it is new and capable of touching the
heart,

(makes the truth)
which we are seeking to impress on our minds and hearts
take on a fresh meaning.

93 Thus, we might turn to another reflection:
that it is a sign that we love God very little
if we rarely recall
that we are in His presence.

cf. Ps 16,8; Gn 28,16

94 This reflection will remind us of the passage
as though for the first time,
and in this way its meaning is renewed,
and the mind discovers a new readiness to apply itself to it
once more.

We must, then, again turn our attention
both to the passage which was at first proposed,
and to this second reflection,
for as long a time as possible.

95 When we find ourselves unable to apply ourselves thereto any
longer
(we still take up another reflection,)
and in this way learn
how to dwell on the thought of God's presence
as long as we find it useful to do so.

96 This is how,
through attention to some passage of faith
joined with some reflection
we can gradually acquire a certain facility
for making ourselves aware of the presence of God
by simple attention.

97 All six of the ways
suggested above for placing ourselves in God's presence,
considered as truths of faith,
can help us to fix our attention on the presence of God,
provided that the reflections we make
on each of these ways
are rare,
and that each of them is prolonged for a considerable time,
as we have just indicated,
and without any reasoning.

98 This manner of placing ourselves in the presence of God by
attention,
and by few reflections,
each of which should be prolonged,
can be called
not simple attention,

but an attention mingled with reflections.
And since these reflections are rare and without reasoning,
no matter how little aptitude a soul may have
for attending to the presence of God by such attention,
it can gradually acquire this habit.

#3 APPLYING OURSELVES TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD BY SIMPLE ATTENTION

- 99** Applying ourselves to the presence of God
by simple attention
consists in being before Him
with a simple interior view of faith
that He is present,
and remaining thus for some time,
for a few minutes, or even a quarter of an
hour, more or less,
as we may feel ourselves interiorly absorbed and
attracted.
- 100** It even happens to a number of souls
who have reached interior detachment
and are free from affection to created things,
that God gives them this grace
which they rarely or even never lose.
And for them this is an anticipation and a foretaste of the joy
of heaven.
- 101** However a soul will not ordinarily
enjoy such a favor
unless it has preserved throughout life its innocence,
or unless it has for a long time remained faithful to God,
and has thoroughly purified itself
not only from sin
and all affection for the slightest sins,
but also is entirely detached from its
selfish inclinations
and all human self-seeking,
and unless it has resolutely turned aside
from what pleases the senses and the mind,
becoming, as it were, uninterested
in such things;
and finally unless it has entirely renounced its own self-
will,
(so that the will of God)
as an active force within the soul
becomes the principle of all it does;
so that the presence and action of God within this soul are

the only,
or practically the only object
of its attention.

- 102** Then such souls can say with St. Paul
that it is no longer they who live,
but Jesus Christ who lives in them. Ga 2,20
And that, so to speak,
they live the very life of God Himself,
which consists in thinking only of Him and of what concerns Him
and in acting only for Him. cf.Jn 5,30; 8,29; 8,55; Jn 14,31
- 103** Souls that have attained this state and have acquired these
dispositions no longer pay attention to creatures
save in so far as they are related to God,
and consequently no longer find anything lovable in them
except that which comes from God;
they can no longer separate the thought of these creatures
from the thought of God.
- 104** Although there exists no comparison
that can make perfectly clear the difference
between the way of placing oneself in God's presence
through reflections and reasonings,
and of doing so
by simple attention,
we may, nevertheless, make use of the one which follows,
or some other one like it,
in order to give some idea of the difference
and to enable us to grasp it, as far as the human mind is
capable of doing so.
- 105** A person, for example, who does not know anything about painting,
sees a beautiful picture,
but cannot judge correctly of its excellence and its
perfection,
(because that person does not know what this
excellence consists in,) or why the picture seems so
beautiful
in the eyes of those well-versed in painting.
- 106** Hence, this person must,
if he wishes to understand the beauty of the picture,
be instructed by a skilled painter
who can teach him, through reasoning,
why this picture is such a good one,
and what constitutes its beauty.

It is also necessary that the painter
helps the person he is instructing
make reflections on his explanations
concerning the beauty of this work.

107 On the contrary,
a person who is perfectly familiar with the art of painting,
as soon as he finds himself in the presence of a
painting that is well done
needs neither much reasoning
nor deep and frequent reflections
to appreciate how beautiful it is
since he perceives this as soon as the picture is before his eyes.

108 That is why, by an act of simple attention
he admires its beauty
and can remain for a long time considering its perfection,
without ever growing bored, or reflecting that he had
been looking at it for a long time.
Because perfection of the work has absorbed his attention
and gives him great pleasure as he considers it;
in fact,
the longer he looks at it
the more he finds it beautiful and pleasing to his eyes
and the more thoroughly does he grasp what makes it so
excellent and surprising
in the eyes of men.

109 It is the same, with all due proportion,
when we apply ourselves to the presence of God in mental
prayer.

110 A person who has just left the world,
or while still living in it,
and who wishes to make mental prayer,
but who, up to now, has done nothing
but satisfy his mind and senses,
is ignorant of the art of knowing God,
and of thinking interiorly of Him and of
His presence.

111 For this reason, it would seem
that the best way for such a one to learn how to think of
God would be to convince himself of God's presence through
various reasons based on faith,
which can help him
to become aware of God's presence.

Such reflections will not withdraw his mind entirely
from material things
for what mind can suddenly turn
from the consideration of material things to that of purely
spiritual realities?

This would be very difficult for many,
and altogether impossible for some.

112 Hence, it seems
to be much more advisable
gradually to insinuate spiritual thoughts
into the minds of those who are beginning
to devote themselves to God and to mental prayer,
by means of material things
combined with and enlivened by considerations inspired by
faith,
and we need to make use of similar means
to help the soul become familiar with the presence of
God,
rather than expecting the mind to apply itself directly
to purely spiritual things with no connection to matter
or to occupy itself with the presence of God
by a pure act of simple attention.

113 Acting thus would merely
(for souls who follow the ordinary path)
make mental prayer tedious;
and might even disgust them, perhaps for always, with the
spiritual life, because,
lacking light and familiarity
with God and with interior practices of the soul,
they would view then
as impossible
what later on, through frequent application to mental
prayer,
(might become for them)
not only possible,
but even easy and agreeable.

114 For this reason,
such persons should ordinarily,
when they first begin to give themselves to mental prayer,
make use of reasonings and frequent reflections,
most of which should be warm and affective,
in order to learn how to apply themselves to the presence of
God.

- 115** However, a person who has devoted himself to mental prayer for a considerable time,
and who finds it easy
to place himself in God's presence in an interior manner,
usually needs only to remain recollected
and to have a simple attention to the presence of God
in order to find his attention absorbed thereby
at least during the time of mental prayer,
without its wandering off during this time.
- 116** This simple attention procures for the soul an inner consolation,
causing it to find delight and joy in this awareness of
the divine presence,
without any need,
in order to maintain this,
of combining it with any other thoughts or reflections.
- 117** Because this simple attention,
without being directed to any particular concepts and
without any concern for self,
occupies the mind so powerfully
and penetrates the heart so deeply,
the mind can dwell on no other thoughts,
and the heart is inclined toward no other affection
than that of God,
and neither mind nor heart can entertain any other affection.
- 118** It is through such simple attention
that the soul detaches itself entirely from created things,
and gradually comes
to a clearer knowledge of
and a more intimate union with
God's own being and of His divine perfections,
When God
possesses a soul,
and is intimately possessed by it,
He cannot allow anything in it
which is not of God or for God
or anything which might still have
the savor of created beings.
- 119** When a soul has been sufficiently purified and detached
from the slightest sins,
so that it can begin to practice
simple attention to the presence of God,
it finds its path
(in the practice of virtue,

in the exercise of mental prayer, and in the facility for concentrating on the presence of God) much shorter and freed from many obstacles.

120 But if a soul wishes to walk resolutely in this path, it should watch over itself very carefully, so as to break off all attachments, even natural ones; for God gives this grace only to souls that are very pure, or which He Himself wishes to purify in this way by His special goodness.

121 It is worth observing, when speaking of applying ourselves to the presence of God, that we should dwell on it for a considerable time, because this contributes more than anything else to procuring for us the spirit of mental prayer and the interior application we should have for it.

We must insure that our mind remains filled with the thought of God's presence as long as possible, and we should not go on to any other subject until we cannot pay attention to this one any longer.

* This ends the explanation of the Preface; what follows is the explanation of the nine acts of the First Part.

EXPLANATION OF THE FIRST PART OF THE METHOD OF MENTAL PRAYER

122 Since the acts of the method of mental prayer (which the Brothers use) prescribed in the first part, all have reference to the presence of God in which we should have tried to place ourselves at the beginning of mental prayer, they will help us very much to remain therein during the whole time of mental prayer, and they can also be of great usefulness to help keep the mind recollected, not only during mental prayer, but even during the day.

123 There are nine acts that it is fitting to make in the first part of mental prayer.