

Instruments of Spiritual Life

being three sermons,
based on Jeremy Taylor's Rules and Exercises of Holy Living,

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The Use of Time

Jeremy Taylor, sometime Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore – in Ireland – who lived around the middle of the 17th century, is counted among the so-called Standard Divines, a group of theologians whose writings have deeply and permanently influenced Anglican thinking. The fourth of the 22 volumes of the edition of his ‘whole works’ which appeared in 1822 contains his ‘Rule and Exercises of Holy Living’. This title may appear strange to us; it does not at all conform to the fashions of the present day. Nevertheless, we can learn much from this essay if we succeed to translate its contents into the language of our time, and to discern what may be useful for us today.

These Rule and Exercises of Holy Living contain chapters on Christian sobriety, Christian justice, and Christian religion. Prefixed is a consideration of what Taylor calls the ‘general instruments and means serving to a holy life’. These general instruments are the Care of our Time, the Purity of Intention, and the Practice of the Presence of God. It seems fit that we confine our interest today on the first of them: the care of our time. Taylor deals with this topic in three parts. He begins with a general reflection, continues with rules for employing our time, and concludes with an exposition of the benefits of this exercise.

First the general reflection:

‘God has given to man but a short time here on earth, and yet on this short time eternity depends.’¹ At my window a glass painting is hanging, showing an old sundial with the inscription: *Ut hora, sic fugit vita*: as the hour, so flees life. God has given to man but a short time on earth. This is something I can confirm to you. It is a general experience that time runs out, and its speed seems to increase year by year. A day is past, and the sun is setting, long before we have accomplished all things which we had in mind for this day. Who has not made this experience? The same thing is true for the week. It is gone far more quickly than we anticipated on Monday. And year after year we have the impression that the years become shorter and shorter. It may be that you are made aware of this all the more if you grow older and older. But I have heard this said by younger people also. Our life is soon cut off, as the psalmist says according to the Authorized Version, and we fly away². Therefore he prays: Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom³. And just this is it what Taylor wishes to teach us: to number our days, i. e. to care for our time.

The reason is: on this short time eternity depends. Unlike e. g. people in the Middle Ages, we are not so much inclined today, to regard our lives as something which has its significance as a preparation for something which comes after death, in the first line. Many have their doubts as to whether there is something like such an afterlife. But we need not argue about this. I guess everybody will agree that life should be meaningful, should be accomplished. But this is not so easy; it must be learnt in the course of life. And the better we perceive this task, the shorter is the time left to us to perform it. ‘For every hour of our life – says Taylor – we must give account to the great Judge of men and angels.’⁴ Every hour, we may say, contributes to the result of our life, and we may be happy if we don't have to look back on too many which we now would prefer to have spent in a more profitable, spiritually profitable, manner.

‘We have a great work to do, many enemies to conquer, many evils to prevent, much danger to run through, many difficulties to be mastered, many necessities to serve, and much good to do, many children to provide for, or many friends to support, or many poor to relieve, besides the needs of nature and of relation, our private and our public cares, and duties of the world.’⁵ And the time which is at our disposal diminishes rapidly. Some of these things which Taylor mentions may be of no great importance for us. E.g. who of us has really many children to provide for? We know that the average number of children is much smaller today than it was at Taylor's time; it would be an interesting topic to reflect on, but this is not today's business for us. Many poor to relieve! There may have been more poverty in Europe at Taylor's time than nowadays. But there is enough of it in today's world. And the challenge it puts to Christians, together with the limitations of our ability to meet it may indeed set us at some unrest.

‘God has given to every man work enough to do that there shall be no room for idleness.’⁶ This is true for many even today, though widespread unemployment – another theme worth being considered another day – makes us hesitate to subscribe to it without qualifications. But he that has the fewest business of this world is called upon to spend more time in the dressing of his soul.

So the consciousness of the limited time at our disposal and the importance and amount of work to be accomplished in its course may well move us to consider how to order our life to make the best and most meaningful use of our time so that at the end we may look back on it without too much regret.

For this ordering of our time Taylor makes a number of suggestions which he calls rules for employing our time.

Every man who has a calling – we understand why Taylor is talking only about men at this moment, but we may well say: every person who has a business or profession – should be diligent in the pursuance of his (or her) employment⁷; he or she should not lightly or without reasonable cause neglect it. Furthermore, the employment should be becoming a reasonable person, not below your dignity⁸. The examples which Taylor mentions here may seem somewhat funny to us: ‘a clergyman must not keep a tavern, nor a judge be an innkeeper’; but we may suppose that he had reason to mention just them. Anyhow, employments which only serve the ends of covetousness, or minister to another's lust, or consist in keeping shops of impurities or intemperance⁹, as he calls it, are not fitting for a Christian person. This may seem to go without saying, but we can perhaps think of quite a number of businesses which might trouble the consciences of people engaged in them a little bit more than they apparently do; people who know me will not be surprised that I mention as one example the production of, and trade in, arms.

When Taylor advises us, ‘as much as may be, (to) cut off all impertinent and useless employments of life, unnecessary and fantastic visits, long waitings upon great personages’¹⁰, I trust we have no difficulties to find enough examples of this in our present time; and when he warns us to ‘avoid curiosity, and all inquiry into things, that concern us not’¹¹, we need only remember how the papers are bought, and reports devoured, which expound those unhappy stories from the royal family of Windsor, but there are other examples in great number. One may well count the editors and writers of these papers among the keepers of shops of impurity and intemperance as mentioned before, but they wouldn't write that if they weren't sure to find many readers.

Up to this moment one might have thought that Taylor urges us to work and work and work. But this is not the case. He does not rule out recreation. To the contrary, he makes it the subject of a separate – and not the shortest – paragraph of his exhortation¹². He is well aware that man cannot work all his time without rest and recreation. For what other is recreation than the renewal of our strength, physical as well as mental. And no man can work without such renewal, a true re-creation of his abilities.

But he does not withhold his advice as to the use of our recreation time. Festivals – he says – should not be just days of idleness. It is better to plough upon holy days than to do nothing or viciously; but the best is, of course, to spend them in the work of the day, i. e. of religion and charity.

Of special importance is the choice of our company: we should avoid the company of drunkards and busy bodies and all such as are apt to talk much to little purpose¹³. And above all, we should never undertake some trifling employment just to pass the time away¹⁴.

The most important object of occupation in our spare time, however, is the practice of religion. In the morning at first, and at the end of the day we should think upon God, something in order to his service in the morning, and how we did it in the evening¹⁵. Spiritually, it is especially profitable if, before we sleep, every night we examine the actions of the past day, how we did, where we might have done better, what we have to repent of, and what we have occasion of thanksgiving for¹⁶. In the course of the day, intervals or void spaces of time are well used if they are employed in prayers, reading &c.¹⁷. Moreover, it is a good habit to set apart some time each day for more solemn devotion and religious employment¹⁸. But not everybody is able to do so. For him who is too busy it may helpful to set apart some solemn time every year during which he may quit all worldly affairs, and attend wholly to meditations, self-examination and prayer, that – in Taylor's words – ‘he may make up his accounts, renew his vows, make amends for his carelessness, and retire back again from whence levity and the vanities of the world, or the opportunity of temptations, or the distractions of secular affairs have carried him’¹⁹.

If we consider all this it may seem to us that a heavy burden is laid upon our shoulders if we are demanded, or at least strongly advised to regard all these things which we have heard of. Therefore it is all the more important to hear what Taylor says in concluding this chapter: ‘Let all these things be done prudently and moderately – he says – , not with scruple and vexation. For these are good advantages, but the particulars are not Divine commandments; and therefore are to be used as shall be found expedient to everyone's condition. ... He is happy, that can secure every hour to a sober or a pious employment: but the duty consists not scrupulously in minutes and half hours, but in greater portions of time; provided that no minute be employed in sin, and the great portions of our time be spent in sober employment, and all the appointed days and some portions of every day be allowed for religion. In all the lesser parts of time, we are left to our own elections and prudent management, and to the consideration of the great degrees and differences of glory, that are laid up in heaven for us according to the degrees of our care, and piety, and diligence.’²⁰

In conclusion, Taylor shows us the benefits of this exercise in the care of our time. These are:

1. the prevention of what he calls beggarly sins, i. e. those sins which idleness and beggary usually betray men to, such as lying, flattery, stealing and dissimulation;

2. an antidote against 'carnal sins', and such as proceed from fullness of bread and emptiness of employment;
3. the prevention of the smallest sins and irregularities of our life, which usually creep upon idle, disemployed, and curious persons;
4. it teaches us not only to avoid evil, but engages us upon doing good, as the proper business of all our days;
5. it prepares us so against sudden changes, that we shall not easily be surprised at the sudden coming of the day of the Lord.

And all this we may sum up saying that these exercises may help us to 'attain when this short life is past the glorious evening that shall last', in other words: it may help us to lead a life which we may regard, in the event, as meaningful and accomplished.

And for this let us pray:

Eternal God: You have created us to do your work after the manner of men, and to serve you in this generation according to our capacities. Give us your grace, that we may be prudent spenders of our time, so as we may best prevent, or resist, all temptations, and be profitable to our neighbours, and by discharging our duties may glorify your name. Take from us all slothfulness, and give us a diligent and active spirit, and wisdom to choose our employments, that we may do works proportionate to our abilities, and to the dignity of a Christian, and may fill up all the spaces of our time with actions of religion and charity. That when the devil assaults us he may not find us idle, and that our Lord at his sudden coming may find us busy in lawful, necessary and pious actions, improving our talents entrusted to us by him, so that we may enter into the joy of our master, to take part in his eternal felicities. Amen.

The Purity of Intention

‘Whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What does anyone gain by winning the whole world at the cost of destroying himself?’²¹ These words of Jesus which we heard in today’s New Testament reading²² touch the very foundations of Christian, even human, living.

Is it not that what we all want to do, save our life? Biologists tell us that there is a gene in us which is programmed to strive for the preservation of self. So is it not quite natural that a man wants to save his life? It is, indeed.

However, for us, the people of the new covenant, the situation seems to be in some way different. Jesus has given us an example in living not for himself, but for others; not saving his life, but giving it for others. A modern writer has called him – in the title of a book – ‘the man for others’, and that is indeed the main characteristic of his life. ‘There is no greater love than this, that someone should lay down his life for his friends.’²³ This was exactly what Jesus did: he gave his life for his friends, for us. And at the same time, he said, ‘I give you a new commandment: love one another, as I have loved you!’²⁴

An exposition of this New Law are the so-called beatitudes which St Matthew records in the Sermon on the Mount²⁵. They have been said to be designed consciously in parallel to the decalogue, the centre of the old law. These beatitudes belong, rightly, to the best known verses of the New Testament:

Blesséd are the poor in spirit; the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Blesséd are the sorrowful; they shall find consolation.

Blesséd are the gentle; for they shall have the earth for their possession. &c.

Nearly two years ago, on Sunday after Easter, 1995, I preached about the peace-makers. As in this world there are many places where peace is fragile, or where there is no peace at all, it might be worthwhile to resume this subject: how to be a peace-maker. We will do this some time. But today, I should like to turn to another of these beatitudes, and one of the most often misunderstood: ‘Blesséd are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.’ The pure in heart. It may seem rather easy to understand what a peace-maker is; but who are the pure in heart, those whose hearts are pure?

Being pure in heart is an aspect of holy living. So we cannot be surprised to find purity of intention among what has been called the three general instruments serving to a holy life about which we talked some time last summer. The first one was the care of our time; on that we meditated last summer. The second instrument is purity of intention.

Intention. If you remember the Great Litany which we considered last time: ‘From all evil and mischief; from pride, vanity, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred and malice; and from all evil intent. Good Lord, deliver us.’ From all evil intent, that of others and our own as well.

The lawyer – and the moralist also – is used to distinguish between the outward action of a person, and the intention by which it is accompanied, and indeed governed. We ourselves are used to base our estimation of human behaviour – to a large extent at least – on the intention by which it is guided. E. g. if we hear that a young man – or woman – spends much of his or her time caring for an old and frail aunt, we may estimate this very highly; but as soon as we notice that he or she does so only with regard to a hoped-for heritage, we are inclined to look at the same actions with quite different eyes.

In Scripture also, there are words which may make us think that it is not so important what we do as in what spirit, in what intention, we do it. E. g. St Paul writes to the Corinthians: ‘You may eat or drink, or do anything else, provided it is all done to the glory of God.’ Doing it to the glory of God: that is acting in purity of intention. By this intention every act of nature becomes religious, every meal an act of worship as well as an act of prayer. Saying grace – we talked about it last summer also – is just a sign of this, brings it to our consciousness. So, the most common action of our life is sanctified. On the other hand, without this intention, the very best actions of our devotion are at least imperfect, if not actually vicious. The person that prays merely out of custom, or gives alms for praise, or fasts to be accounted religious – an aspect very near to our thoughts in this lenten time – , we regard as to be not more than just a hypocrite.

About the importance of this purity of intention St Paul writes to the Corinthians: ‘I may speak in tongues of men or of angels, but if I have no love, I am a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. I may give all I possess to the needy, I may give my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I gain nothing by it.’²⁶ Acting just for love, without regard for our own advantage – material or spiritual – that is acting in purity of intention. And at the same time, it is not trying to save one’s own life. Remember the parable of the judgement: when the king said to those he had placed on his right side, ‘when I was hungry, you gave me food,’ they replied, ‘when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you?’ They did not know. They hadn’t done it purposefully to gain the king’s reward; they had done it just for love.

However, that we let ourselves be guided by a pure intention, in order to put this into practice it is expedient to set some rules.

The first rule should be that in every major action we undertake we first reflect upon the end; and before undertaking it we should consider why we do it, what the end of our action is, and for what we hope as our reward of it. This reflection may well take the form of a prayer

- a prayer for guidance that we be careful not to undertake anything which – using adequate consideration – we might recognise as contrary to the will of God;
- a prayer for sincerity that we design it to the glory of God, and the good of our fellow human beings;
- and a prayer for blessing and protection that what we intend for an innocent and holy purpose may not by way of chance or misunderstanding be turned into evil, or made an occasion of sin.

For we know very well that actions which have been begun in the best intention may be turned to evil by events which we did not foresee; and we have reason enough to beware of that. This prayer does not, of course, relieve us from the obligation of using our utmost caution to prevent such events and their consequences. On the contrary, it reinforces this our obligation, and reminds us of it.

It is important that this consciousness be not limited to the time of our beginning, but kept throughout the whole course of our activity. Then only, if at all, we can really avoid the danger that our work which began well, and was intended for God's glory and the good of our neighbour, declines and ends in our own praise or temporal satisfaction, or even in sin.

If, nonetheless, an accidental event which was not intended by us comes to pass, we must not let it be taken in our purpose. E. g. if by telling a true story we can do an ill turn to someone we don't like, we must by no means do it.

On the other hand, if any temptation to spoil our purposes happens in a religious duty it would of course be a mistake to omit the action altogether, instead of trying to rectify our intention, and to overcome the temptation. St Bernard is told to have been tempted by the devil to vain-glory for his holiness; but only to have replied: 'I neither began for you, nor will I make an end for you.' Fortunately, one might say, of us only a few, if any, have reason to feel tempted to vain-glory for exceptional holiness.

Not every temporal end, however, is to be regarded as defiling a holy and pure intention, but only when it contradicts any of the purposes of God, or when it supersedes the spiritual purpose of an act of religion. Otherwise, a temporal end may be part of our duty. Such are all the actions of our profession. So as we are commanded to provide for our families we are justified in taking account the amount of money which we may earn by our work.

We may imagine that it is easy not only to deceive others about our intentions, but also to deceive ourselves. It is a common experience that the human heart is very well able to convince itself of the holiness and unselfishness of its intentions while its purposes in reality are not at all holy and unselfish. Therefore, it is appropriate to look for signs which may enable us to make a judgement whether our intentions are pure, and our purposes holy.

The first sign is that we set upon our actions of religious or civil life an affection proportionate to their importance; that we care for our temporal affairs with a desire not greater than our necessity; and that in our religion we be zealous, active, and operative, so far as prudence permits. When we choose any temporal inconvenience rather than commit a sin, when we prefer to do a duty rather than to get a gain, then our intention is manifestly pure. But when we are cheerful, prompt, ready and busy in our recreation or in the pursuit of our profit, but slowly, flatly, and without appetite in the works of our religion, that is a sign that our heart is not with God, but cleaves too much to this world.

Secondly, it is likely that our hearts are pure and our intentions spotless if we are not solicitous of the opinion and censures of other people, but only that we do our duty. If we like to have our virtues published we seek not virtue but glory, and not glory with God, but glory with men. 'Do good, and talk about it!' We all know this saying. But just this is an unmistakable sign – as a rule – that our intention is not directed to the fulfilling of God's law of love, but to the spreading of our own glory.

It is well also if we are not solicitous or troubled concerning the effect of all our actions. If we do our best using our limited means, this may be worthier than impressing things wrought by people of greater means. The poor widow who dropped two tiny coins together worth a penny into the offering chest gave more than the rich people who put in large amounts²⁷. Sometimes we may wish to have more in order to be able to give more. But on the whole, if we are indifferent whether we serve God in riches or in poverty we are rather seekers of God than of ourselves.

Another sign of the purity of our intention is that we love virtue for God's sake and honour it wherever it is found. If we are envious at a virtue not our own, at the perfection or excellence of our neighbour, we are not covetous of the virtue, but of its reward and reputation.

Let us conclude our consideration with an example. Next month, on 7th April – because 25th March is Tuesday in Holy Week – we celebrate the feast of the Annunciation of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Blesséd Virgin Mary. The mother of our Lord may, I think, serve as a brilliant example of what is meant by purity of heart. 'Behold the hand-maid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.'²⁸ Mary simply acquiesces to what the angel tells her. We need not think that this must have been easy for her – having regard to her time and her position; and I have heard it saying that we need not infer that the whole story took not more time than we need to read it. Mary may well have thought about the words of the angel for quite a while, before she answered. But in the event, she assented. She anticipated – so to speak – the words of her son in the garden of Gethsemane: 'Not my will but yours'.²⁹ She did not consider her own honour, her own future, but in love she integrated her will into God's. And this I think is the core of her virginity, not a physical, physiological peculiarity – something which may have happened, but the importance of which for us it is difficult to show – but the purity of heart which enabled her just to accept what should happen to her without regard of her own person. This purity of heart, by which she became an integral part of what has been called the saving Christ-event, is the real reason for that – as we have sung in the Magnificat 'from this day all generations will call me blesséd'. Blesséd are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The Orthodox Church sings in the so-called Anthem to the Theotokos, the God-bearer:

You have beheld the King in his beauty,
Mary, daughter of Israel.
You have made answer for the creation
to the redeeming will of God.

Blesséd are the pure in heart; those who do not try by all means to save their lives, but offer them up. They shall see God, behold the King in his beauty. To him, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be ascribed as is most justly due all might, majesty, dominion and praise, from henceforth and for evermore. Amen.

The Practice of the Presence of God

One morning, when the whole family sat at breakfast, the son of the Rector of St Christopher's Episcopal Church, Frankfurt on Main, asked his father, 'Where is God?' 'God is everywhere,' his father replied. 'Is he in this room also?' 'He is in this room also.' 'Where in this room?' 'Everywhere.' 'In all things?' 'In all things.' Then the boy quickly put his hand on his empty cup and said, 'Got him.'

God is everywhere; omnipresent, as the theologians use to say. He is present at all times and in all places. Christians believe this, and know this, in general, and in theory. But they are not always aware of what it means in particular, and in practice. It seems to be worth while to devote some consideration to this.

God 'will raise us to live in his presence', we heard in today's first reading³⁰. Christians do indeed believe that God is present in all places, that he sees all that is done, hears all that is said, and understands every thought. As the psalmist sings³¹:

Lord, you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You trace my journeys and my resting places
and are acquainted with all my ways.
If I climb up to heaven, you are there;
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there your hand will lead me
and your right hand hold me fast.

This is not only a wonderful piece of poetry; it conveys a very strong awareness of the omnipresence of God; and by the way, a verse as this, 'If I climb up to heaven, you are there,' may mean more to us in this age of space-ships than it meant in the psalmist's own days.

God is with us wherever we go. There are no places in the world which may be called forsaken by God, *gottverlassen* as Germans call it; and the same holds good for all times of our lives. Nowhere and never we are without God. Some time ago, I heard a little story read on radio. 'As I went through my life,' a man said to God, 'you went at my side. Though I did not see you, I saw a second pair of footprints beside mine. But in the darkest moments of my life you were not there. I could not see the footprints.' But God answered, 'I was there at those moments also. I carried you on my arms, and therefore you saw only one pair of footprints.'

God is really all-present. He is present at the darkest moments of our lives, wherever we are. But God is more especially present in some places to special purposes.

This speciality of presence is not rooted in his essence, his nature as such. With regard to this he is fully present everywhere; this is true, and it remains true. But for our benefit, as we have trouble to discern his presence everywhere alike, he is present especially in places. So we may say that God in himself is equally present everywhere, but 'for us and for our salvation' – these words may remind us of the Nicene Creed where we confess that 'for us and for our salvation' Christ came down from heaven – he is especially present at certain times and places.

Traditionally, it is said that God's special place, 'his seat', is in heaven. Now heaven is not a place in the strict sense of the word, though many people have thought so, and the language we use intimates it. But we must keep in mind that using this language is making a picture. It is very easy to misunderstand this language of God being in heaven, or 'above', as meaning that he is far away, even in a place where we cannot get to. The picture of God sitting in heaven – often augmented by descriptions of his entourage as one of an ancient oriental court – signifies in the first line God's glory which is – as God is spirit – essentially spiritual.

At the same time, saying that God is 'in heaven' shall remind us that God sees everything. In this respect we must beware a serious misunderstanding too. We talk of God's 'eyes'. 'Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him', sings the psalmist,³² and the prophet Amos quotes God as saying, 'I have my eyes on this sinful kingdom.'³³ 'Nothing in creation can hide from him,' writes the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, 'everything lies bare and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render account.'³⁴ But of course, we do not mean that God has physical eyes. What is meant, really, is that everything that happens in the world cannot disappear totally. It is retained, preserved in God, though in a way we can hardly imagine, transfigured so to speak. It contributes to God's continuing being. This deepens our responsibility tremendously, of course.

However, the Bible teaches us not to be frightened by God's presence, by the idea of his eyes resting on us. As we have heard it: after having contemplated the presence of God in the remote hiding-places, the

psalmist says, 'Even there your hand will lead me, and your right hand hold me fast.' He does not feel fear, but confidence in God's helping hand. So we need not be embarrassed, but may be comforted; for 'the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.'³⁵ As we heard in today's first reading, 'He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rains that water the earth.'³⁶ So for us, to know that God's eye is upon us is reason for comfort and joy.

Furthermore, we think of God as being especially present in holy places, e. g. in churches. We call this church in which we worship the house of God. Of course – to repeat it once more – God as such is not confined to houses made by human hands; he is present outside the church building essentially in the same way as within it. But for us, the church is a place where we are especially aware of his presence. You may walk over the lawn outside and see God in every green leaf of the trees and bushes. But as a rule we do not think so all the time, let alone the difficulty of discerning Jesus Christ there. For this reason we need the church time and time again to converse with God without distraction.

I returned yesterday from a brief visit to the German Orthodox Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Buchhagen, Lower Saxony. There two German monks are living and worshipping according to the ancient Orthodox tradition, though translated into the German language and culture. In Orthodox churches with their dim light, their icons, their many candles the feeling of the presence of the Holy, of God, is even stronger than in western churches like ours; and I should wish that we, or at least some of us, might some time go to places like that and visit the monks, worship with them, and let them talk to us about their spiritual experiences regarding the presence of God in their worship.

Furthermore, God is especially present for us in people. That is the reason why the Church honours the saints: God acts through them in the world. If we return for a moment to the world of Orthodox thinking, they may be called icons of God. In them and through them he shows his presence to the world. But the same is true for many with regard to members of their families. Recently, I read that in the course of a questioning of people as to whom they regarded to be the most influential person in their religious life, many said it was their grandmother. So we may say that God was especially present to them in this person.

All this we should continually bear in our minds, and this is supported by the frequent return of the actual thought that God is always present in our lives.

So it is a good thing to begin all actions of religion with an act of adoration, i. e. to worship God solemnly, to place ourselves in his presence, and to behold him with the eyes of faith; when we enter a church, to quieten our mind; to stop our tongue and, as far as possible, our wandering thoughts; just to rest in God's presence. If we so fix our desires on him, as the object of our worship, the reason of our hope, and the fountain of all our blessings, all the following parts of our devotions will correspond to the glory of God's presence.

But we do well to regard *all* things we see as pointers to God, as representing to our spirit the presence, the excellence, and the power of God. In the face of the sun we may see God's glory, in the fire, his heat warming, in the water, his gentleness to refresh us. And if we recognise God in every creature, we do well being cruel towards none, neither abuse any by intemperance. It may seem excessive to us that a Hindu refuses to harm any animal, that he leaves the holy cows unworried in the streets even if they obstruct the traffic seriously, or that he refuses even to kill a fly because it might be a re-incarnation of his grandfather. But in this, there is a limited apprehension at least of the pervading presence of God in all created beings which should move us at least to avoid any unnecessary harm to our fellow-creatures.

We may perceive God's presence in occurrences also. Having just escaped serious damage in traffic, or even having trapped ourselves in some inadvertence which might have led to serious consequences in other circumstances, we may say that we were lucky; but it would be more appropriate for a Christian to thank God for his preserving goodness shining through these occurrences.

'God is in the bowels of your brother', someone has said. If we remember this, we shall be moved to refresh them when he needs it. We give our alms in the presence of God, remembering that according to his own word, what we do to one of the least of our brothers or sisters, we do it to him.

Our sense of the presence of God is greatly strengthened by frequent colloquies and conversations with God. 'Seven times a day do I praise you'³⁷. The devout Pharisee could boast of such a practice of prayer, and even today we find it in monasteries of the Benedictine tradition. The average person living in the world may have difficulties when trying to observe this rule. But it is possible at least to observe some times of prayer regularly, e. g. in the morning, in the evening and later in the night. In doing this we may well impress the awareness of God's presence in our lives upon ourselves.

What are the benefits of these exercises?

The exercise of considering God's presence is, firstly, an excellent help in our prayers. It produces in us reverence to the Divine Majesty of God, and at the same time actual devotion in our offices.

From the same fountain issue humility of spirit, an apprehension of our great needs, our daily wants and hourly supplies. This again may cause admiration of God's unspeakable mercies, and a great modesty and decency in all things. It restrains the scatterings and looseness of wandering thoughts. It establishes the heart in good purposes and leads on to perseverance: something a little group like ours especially needs.

At the same time, it produces confidence in God, and fearlessness of our enemies, patience in trouble and hope of remedy. Since God is so near in all our sad accidents, he is a disposer of human hearts and the events of things. He proportions out our trials, and supplies us with remedy. Figuratively speaking: where his rod strikes us, his staff supports us.

A particularly important benefit of our exercises may be that they lead us to joy and rejoicing in God. 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.' Many of you know that this word of St Paul to the Philippians belongs to my favourite verses in the bible. And I strongly feel that much of the lack of success in bringing people to Jesus which the Church experiences today is due to the fact that we are unable to convince people that they have reason to rejoice, even at a difficult time like ours when lack of jobs and rising violence, in society and between the nations, have created a climate of disappointment, of fear, and even of 'no future'.

So may the awareness of God's presence in our lives, generally, and especially in persons and in places, enlighten our minds, refresh our spirits, and shed joy into our hearts so that through our lives God may be glorified and our fellow human beings drawn to him. Amen.

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- ¹ p. 13.
 - ² Ps. 90.10.
 - ³ v. 12.
 - ⁴ p. 13 seq.
 - ⁵ p. 14.
 - ⁶ p. 15.
 - ⁷ p. 16 n. 2.
 - ⁸ p. 17.
 - ⁹ p. 18.
 - ¹⁰ p. 19 n. 15.
 - ¹¹ p. 19 n. 14.
 - ¹² p. 19 n. 16.
 - ¹³ p. 16 n. 5.
 - ¹⁴ p. 16 n. 6.
 - ¹⁵ p. 16 n. 1.
 - ¹⁶ p. 21 n. 22.
 - ¹⁷ p. 16. Cf. Kallistos Ware, *The Power of the Name*, SLG Press, ch. 3.
 - ¹⁸ p. 20 n. 17.
 - ¹⁹ p. 21 n. 21.
 - ²⁰ pp. 21/22 n. 23.
 - ²¹ Lk 9.24–25.
 - ²² Lk 9.18–27.
 - ²³ Jn 15.13.
 - ²⁴ Jn 13.34.
 - ²⁵ Mt 5.3–12.
 - ²⁶ 1Cor 13.1,3.
 - ²⁷ Mk 12.43.
 - ²⁸ Lk 1.38.
 - ²⁹ Mt 26.39.
 - ³⁰ Hos 6.1–6, at 2.
 - ³¹ Ps. 139.1,2,7–9.
 - ³² Ps 33.18.
 - ³³ Amos 9.8.
 - ³⁴ Hebr 4.13.
 - ³⁵ Ps 33.18 sq.
 - ³⁶ Hos 6.1–6 at v. 3.
 - ³⁷ Ps 119.164.