

OUR PLACE

PRESENCE OF GOD - O my God, help me to know You and to know myself! I know that You are He who is, and I am he who is not!

MEDITATION

1. Among all the creatures in which we take pleasure and toward which our nature seems to be attracted the most, *self* undoubtedly holds the first place. There is no one, no matter how limited in talents and good qualities, who does not love his own excellence, and who does not try, in one way or another, to make it shine forth to himself and to others. It is for this reason that we often spontaneously exaggerate our own worth, and as a result are demanding and pretentious. This makes us haughty and arrogant, as well as difficult in our relations with others. Humility is the virtue which keeps within just limits the love of one's own excellence. Whereas self-esteem often induces us to make ourselves too evident, or to occupy a place which is higher than our due, humility keeps us *in our own place*. Humility is truth: it tends to establish in truth both our intellect—by making us know ourselves as we really are—and our life, by inclining us to take, in relation to God and to men, our proper place and no other.

Humility makes us realize that, in the sight of God, we are only His little creature, entirely dependent upon Him for our existence and for all our works. Having received life from God, we cannot subsist even one moment independently of Him. He who gave us existence by His creative action, maintains life in us by His conserving action. In addition we cannot perform the slightest act without God's cooperation, in the same way that a machine—even a perfect one—cannot make any motion until it is started by the one who made it. It is very true that, unlike the machine, our acts are neither mechanical nor compulsory, but are conscious and free; yet, we cannot move even a finger without the concurrence of the divine Artist.

It follows then that everything we possess in the order of being—qualities, gifts, capacities—and everything we have accomplished in the order of action, is not ours, but all, in one way or another, are gifts of God, all are acts performed with God's help. "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor 4,7).

2. In the supernatural order, where everything depends on grace, the words of Jesus, "Without Me you can do nothing" (Jn 15,5), are more strictly verified. Although in Baptism, sanctifying grace raised us to the supernatural order, and the infused virtues made us capable of producing supernatural acts, still St. Paul says: "No man can say the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor 12,3). In order to perform even the tiniest supernatural act we need God's help; we need actual grace which prevents us by its inspirations and accompanies us in the act until it is accomplished.

The great theologian, who has profoundly studied Catholic doctrine, has as absolute a need of actual grace in order to put into practice the most insignificant point of Catholic doctrine or to produce a single act of the love of God as does the peasant who knows nothing beyond his catechism. Even a saint, one who has received so many favors and divine lights and has attained to heroic virtue, cannot perform the smallest virtuous act without the help of actual grace. How total then must be our dependence upon God! We are very far from the truth if, trusting in our own knowledge or long practice in the spiritual life, we believe that our lights or our virtues are sufficient to make us act like good Christians. No, St. Paul warns us: "*sufficiencia nostra ex Deo est*," our sufficiency is from God (2 Cor 3,5). Without God we cannot think, or speak, or desire any good, "for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will" (Phil 2,13).

Of ourselves, then, we have only the one capacity which belongs to our limited nature, injured by original sin: the capacity to fail in our duties and to sin. If we take away from ourselves what is of God, we will find that of ourselves we are nothing, or rather less than nothing, for nothingness is incapable of offending God, while we have this sad capability.

COLLOQUY

"O omnipotent Father, God of truth, God of love, permit me to enter into the cell of self-knowledge. I admit that of myself I am nothing, but that all the being and goodness in me comes solely from You. Show me my faults, that I may detest my malice, and thus I shall flee from self-love and find myself clothed again in the nuptial robe of divine charity, which I must have in order to be admitted to the nuptials of life eternal" (St. Catherine of Siena).

"Give me, O my God, a thorough knowledge of myself! Let me be really convinced that I am nothing and that You are everything! Do not let me think that I am anything more than the nothing I am. Let me do nothing more for myself, but all for You! Grant that no creature may think any more about me, do anything more for me, give me anything more, but let all be done for You and given to You. And may my nothingness be reduced to nothing in the eyes of all creatures and in Yours, my God, that You, the All, may be all, in all and through all" (St. John Eudes).

Reveal my nothingness to me, O Lord, reveal it so well that, not only shall I understand it, but I shall also have a practical, profound conviction of it. You know how painful that is to my proud nature! My intellect cannot resist the evidence of truth and is obliged to admit that I am nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing without You, yet my ego is always trying to attribute something to itself, to take the credit for this or that and to take as much pleasure in it as if it were its own. Help me, O Lord, to triumph over this pride which, as You see, steals Your gifts and makes my life sterile by preventing me from receiving the abundance of Your graces.

Grant that I may know my nothingness, O Lord, for the more I recognize it with simplicity and humility of heart, the more You will take pleasure in being my All—You are All, I am nothing; You, He who is and I, he who is not! Glorify Yourself then in my nothingness! May Your love and grace triumph in this nothing, but may Your mercy also triumph, for I am a nothing which has sinned. *Peccavi, Domine, miserere mei!*