

THE SPIRIT'S SIXTH GIFT: PIETY—LOVING GOD

Is 11:2; Jn 1:12-13; Rm 8:14-17; I Tim 2:2, 5:4

I. DEFINING PIETY/GODLINESS

- A. L. *pietas* & Gk *eusebia* both mean piety or godliness
- B. St Thomas Aquinas: “Now the Holy Ghost moves us to this effect among others, of having a filial affection towards God, according to Rm. 8:15, ‘ You have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: *Abba* (Father).’ And since it belongs properly to piety to pay duty and worship to one’s father, it follows that piety, whereby, at the Holy Ghost’s instigation, we pay worship and duty to God as our Father, is a gift of the Holy Ghost” (*ST*, II-II, Q. 121, A. 1).

II. GIVEN OUR STATUS as “SONS OF GOD” via grace in:

- A. Regeneration: born again (Jn 1:12-13)
- B. Adoption: legally entitled—“Abba, Father” (Rm 8:14-17)

III. PIETY INVOLVES WORSHIPING (attributing worth to) THE FATHER

- A. Progenitor (both earthly & heavenly) praised as “maker and giver of life”
 - 1. Conception: existing being
 - 2. Formation: essence (e.g. DNA) given
- B. *Pater of familia* (both earthly & heavenly) respected—*patriarchy’s* singular advantages
 - 1. Head of family: provide, protect
 - 2. Lawgiver: set forth, enforce rules
- C. Pedagogue (both earthly & heavenly) followed
 - 1. Traditions understood & maintained(e.g. Christmas, birthdays; family lore)
 - 2. Apprenticeship embraced: much “know-how” needed
- D. Pietistic Pioneers (leaving treasury of devotional classics, continually read by devout souls)
 - 1. Fathers of the Church: Irenaeus, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Pope Gregory I, et al
 - 2. Medieval Mystics: St Bernard of Clairvoux, Thomas a Kempis, Johan Tauler;
 - 3. English Puritans: Jeremy Taylor (*Rules on Holy Living & Holy Dying*)
 - 4. German (Lutheran) Pietists: Johan Arndt; Jacob Spener (*Pia Desideria*)
 - 5. American Evangelicals: Cotton Mather; Jonathan Edwards (*Religious Affections*)
 - 6. English & American Methodists: John & Charles Wesley; E. Stanley Jones
- D. Pietistic Practices
 - 1. Public worship “services” designed to touch heart, elicit laymen’s involvement
 - 2. Personal devotions: Bible reading & studies, both private & corporate; prayer;

IV. PIETY REQUIRES DOING DUTY

- A. Procreation (Gn 1:28): be fruitful & multiply; *Paterfamilia*, maintaining godly families, with fathers (“do not exasperate your children”) & mothers (“submit to your husbands”) & children (“obey your parents”) all doing assigned tasks (cf. Paul’s instructions in Eph 5:22-6:4)
- B. Stewardship (Gn 2:15): tend garden, care for creation—godly vocations (i.e. farming, healing, teaching, building, policing) embraced
- C. Morality: Keeping Commandments:--Decalogue internalized, institutionalized, defended
- D. Discipleship: learning from, patterning after, Master
 - 1. Clement of Alexandria: *Christ the Educator*
 - 2. Brother Lawrence: *The Practice of the Presence of God*
 - 3. John Bunyan: *Pilgrim’s Progress*
 - 4. Jean-Pierre de Caussade: *Abandonment to Divine Providence*
 - 5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *The Cost of Discipleship*
 - 6. Dallas Willard: *The Spirit of the Disciplines*
- E. Charity: corporal acts of mercy
 - 1. Feed the Hungry—e.g. Food for the Poor, World Vision, Compassion International,
 - 2. Give Drink to the Thirsty—e.g. Healing Waters
 - 3. Shelter the Homeless—e.g. Salvation Army or Denver’s “Seven Steps” center
 - 4 Visit the Sick—e.g. local congregation’s Deacons; giving blood at community blood bank
 - 5. Visit the Prisoners—e.g. Prison Fellowship
 - 6. Bury the Dead—e.g. cards to bereaved; congregational commitment re support for funerals
 - 7. Give Alms to the Poor—local food banks; national relief agencies; international needs

Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*

The “Abandonment to Divine Providence” . . . is a trusting, childlike, peaceful abandonment to the guidance of grace, and of the Holy Spirit: an unquestioning and undoubting submission to the holy will of God in all things that may befall us, be they due to the action of man, or to the direct permission of God. To Fr. de Caussade, abandonment to God, the “*Ita Pater*” of our Divine Lord, the “*Fiat*” of our Blessed Lady, is the shortest, surest, and easiest way to holiness and peace.

—de Caussade, Jean-Pierre. *Abandonment to Divine Providence* (p. 4). Kindle Edition.

Mary was the most simple of all creatures, and the most closely united to God. Her answer to the angel when she said: “*Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*”: contained all the mystic theology of her ancestors to whom everything was reduced, as it is now, to the purest, simplest submission of the soul to the will of God, under whatever form it presents itself. This beautiful and exalted state, which was the basis of the spiritual life of Mary, shines conspicuously in these simple words, “*Fiat mihi*” (Luke i, 38). Take notice that they are in complete harmony with those which Our Lord desires that we should have always on our lips and in our hearts: “*Fiat voluntas tua.*”

Ibid., p. 5

In reality sanctity can be reduced to one single practice, fidelity to the duties appointed by God. Now this fidelity is equally within each one’s power whether in its active practice, or passive exercise. The active practice of fidelity consists in accomplishing the duties which devolve upon us whether imposed by the general laws of God and of the Church, or by the particular state that we may have embraced. Its passive exercise consists in the loving acceptance of all that God sends us at each moment.

Ibid., pp. 6-7

Only those which forbid things evil in themselves are absolute, because it is never allowable to commit sin. Can there, then, be anything more reasonable? What excuse can be made? Yet this is all that God requires of the soul for the work of its sanctification. He exacts it from both high and low, from the strong and the weak, in a word from all, always and everywhere. It is true then that He requires on our part only simple and easy things since it is only necessary to employ this simple method to attain to an eminent degree of sanctity. If, over and above the Commandments, He shows us the counsels as a more perfect aim, He always takes care to suit the practice of them to our position and character. He bestows on us, as the principal sign of our vocation to follow them, the attractions of grace which make them easy. He never impels anyone beyond his strength, nor in any way beyond his aptitude. Again, what could be more just? All you who strive after perfection and who are tempted to discouragement at the remembrance of what you have read in the lives of the saints, and of what certain pious books prescribe; O you who are appalled by the terrible ideas of perfection that you have formed for yourselves; it is for your consolation that God has willed me to write this. Learn that of which you seem to be ignorant. This God of all goodness has made those things easy which are common and necessary in the order of nature, such as breathing, eating, and sleeping. No less necessary in the supernatural order are love and fidelity, therefore it must needs be that the difficulty of acquiring them is by no means so great as is generally represented. Review your life. Is it not composed of innumerable actions of very little importance? Well, God is quite satisfied with these. They are the share that the soul must take in the work of its perfection. This is so clearly explained in Holy Scripture that there can be no doubt about it: “Fear God and keep the commandments, this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes xii, 13), that is to say--this is all that is required on the part of man, and it is in this that active fidelity consists. If man fulfils his part God will do the rest.

Ibid., p. 7

It is the heart that must be changed. When I say heart, I mean will. Sanctity, then, consists in willing all that God wills for us. Yes! sanctity of heart is a simple “fiat,” a conformity of will with the will of God.

Ibid., p. 14