

Spiritual Wisdom in the Letters of Ignatius Loyola

This is a collection of passages from Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola, edited by William J. Young (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959). In brackets: letter number, followed by page number in Young.

For readability, I have adapted the text somewhat by omitting ellipses (which usually indicate omitted text) and also by making plurals out of singulars, both in order to avoid exclusionary language and to form a more general statement out of his particular advice to a person. I have retained the masculine “he” for God in order to retain its highly personal connotations and not distract the reader by a “she.” Not to be exclusivist, I have also called the Devil a “he.”

NB Ig in the letters speaks of the Holy Spirit and the Lord as giving consolation, etc., and the opposites being from a bad spirit or "The Enemy"

—Tad Dunne

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Prayer

Every kind of meditation in which the understanding is engaged wearies the body. There are other kinds of meditation, orderly and restful, which are pleasant to the understanding and offer no difficulty to the interior faculties of the soul, and which can be made without interior or exterior expenditure of effort. [8,24]

They should practice the seeking of God’s presence in all things, in their conversations, their walks, in all that they see, taste, hear, understand, in all their actions, since His Divine Majesty is truly in all things by His presence, power, and essence. This kind of meditation, which finds God our Lord in all things, is easier than raising oneself to the consideration of divine truths which are more abstract and which demand something of an effort if we are to keep our attention on them. But this method is an excellent exercise to prepare us for great visitations of our Lord, even in prayers that are rather short. [1854, 240]

(As to prayer and meditation, if there are no bothersome or dangerous temptations, as I have observed, I notice that he [Ignatius] rather approves the effort to find God in all things than that one should spend a long time in prayer. — Polanco) [1848, 236]

In dealing with the neighbor, pray every day especially with the intention that God give you the grace of discretion, so that you will build up and not tear down. [Ap 3:8, 158]

Make resolutions in the morning and twice in the course of the day make the examen. [123, 96]

Basic Attitudes

Although others may think otherwise, whenever I think of the Divine Goodness, it seems to me that *ingratitude* is the most abominable of sins—that any creature capable of enjoying His divine and everlasting glory should detest it in the sight of our Creator and Lord. After all, it is a forgetting of the graces, the benefits, and the blessings received. As such it is the cause, the beginning, the origin of all sins and every misfortune. [38, 55]

God asks only one thing of me, that my soul seek to be conformed with His Divine Majesty. And the soul so conformed makes the body conformed, whether it wish it or not, to the divine will. In this is our greatest battle, and here the good pleasure of the eternal and sovereign Goodness. May our Lord by His infinite kindness and grace hold us always in His hand. [8, 25]

Apart from offense on the part of our neighbor, the more we desire to succeed in clothing ourselves with the livery of Christ our Lord (which is woven out of insult, false witness, and every other kind of injustice) the more we shall advance in spirit and earn those spiritual riches with which our souls desire to be adorned, if we are leading spiritual lives. [81, 81]

May our Lord give us the light of holy discretion to make use of creatures in the light of the Creator. [6454, 421]

Direct your thoughts and affections and employ them in attaining the end for which God created you: that is, His own honor and glory, your own salvation, and the help of your neighbor. God has called you to this, in which His glory and the salvation of the neighbor are set before you, not as a general end but one toward which you must make all your life and its various activities into a continuous sacrifice. (169, 122]

The more advanced, experienced and perfect one is in humility and charity, the more one will be aware of the slightest things that stand in one's way,

even in the most insignificant thoughts, even though they may appear to be of little or no importance. [101, 35]

For your encouragement you should keep before your eyes, not those who you think will accomplish less but rather those who are active and energetic. Do not ever permit the children of this world to show greater care and solicitude for the things of time than you show for those of eternity. It should bring a blush to your cheek to see them run to death more unhesitatingly than you to life. Hold yourselves as little worth if a courtier serve with greater care merely to have the favor of an earthly prince than you do for the favor of the King of Heaven, or if a soldier for the honor and glory of a victory and a little booty gets himself ready and battles more bravely than you do for the victory and triumph over the world, the devil, and yourselves, with the Kingdom of heaven and everlasting glory as your prize. [169, 123]

One energetic act is worth a thousand that are listless. What the lazy cannot accomplish in many years the energetic usually achieve in a short time. [169, 123]

The negligent, because they do not struggle against self, never win peace of soul, or do so tardily and never possess any virtue in its fullness, while the energetic and industrious make notable advances on both fronts. [169, 123]

Experience proves that in this life peace and satisfaction are had, not by the listless but by those who are fervent in God's service. [169, 123-4]

Tepidity is the cause of a lifetime of uneasiness, for we never get rid of its cause, which is self-love, nor do we deserve God's help. [169, 124]

Make your desire known by works. [169, 125]

Spiritual infirmities such as tepidity are caused, not only by chills but even by overwarmth, such as excessive fervor. Let your service be a reasonable service, that is, discretion. [169, 126]

St. Bernard gives this advice: "Good will is not always to be trusted, but it must be bridled, regulated, especially in beginners." [169, 127]

It is possible that the greatness of love which overwhelms the soul should find relief even in things that are earthly and base, without making oneself earthly or base but loving them all for God our Lord and insofar as they are directed to His glory and service. This is something which necessarily has to do with our last end, which is itself perfect and infinite goodness, which must be loved in all other things. To this end exclusively the whole weight of our love should be thrust. And indeed, He is entirely deserving of that love, since

He created us all, redeemed us all, and thus gave Himself without reserve. It is with reason that He will not have us withhold a part of ourselves, since He has so completely given himself to us and desires to give Himself to us forever. [171, 131]

Regarding the faults of individuals, it is certainly necessary that those who know themselves should recognize the faults they have. For we will never be free of them in the state of our present misery until in the furnace of the everlasting love of God our Creator and Lord all our wickedness shall be entirely consumed, when our souls shall be completely penetrated and possessed by Him. Then our wills will be perfectly conformed to—or rather, transformed into—His will, which is essential rectitude and infinite goodness. [214, 153-4]

Try to keep your soul always in peace and quiet, always ready for whatever our Lord may wish to work in you. [214, 180]

It is certainly a more lofty virtue of the soul, and a greater grace, to be able to enjoy the Lord in different duties and places than in one only. We should, in the Divine Goodness, make a great effort to attain this. [214, 180]

Seek His most holy gifts, such as the gift of tears. This could be (1) because of our own sins or the sins of others; or (2) while contemplating the mysteries of the life of Christ either here on earth or in heaven; or (3) from a loving consideration of the three Divine Persons. The higher our thoughts soar, the greater their worth. The third is more perfect than the second, and the second than the first. But for a given person that level will be much better on which our Lord communicates more of Himself in His holy graces and spiritual gifts, because He sees and knows what is best for you. Like one who knows all, He points out the way to you. [214, 181]

We should love the body insofar as it is obedient and helpful to the soul. [214, 180]

When the body falls ill because of excessive effort, it is the most reasonable thing to seek the higher gifts by acts of the understanding and other more moderate exercises. For it is not the soul alone that should be healthy. If the mind is healthy in a healthy body, all will be healthy and much better prepared to give God greater service. [466, 181]

Even the prophets themselves do not in every instance see everything in the prophetic light as clearly and as positively as they may say they do. [Ap 6:3, 197]

Your first and greatest asset will be a distrust of self together with a great and magnanimous trust in God. [Ap 1:18, 212]

Make yourselves loved by your humility and charity, becoming all things to all people. See to it that no one goes away from you sad, unless it be for the good of his or her soul. [Ap 1:18, 213]

All should try to conceive great resolves and elicit equally great desires to be true and faithful servants of God. [1899, 245]

If you have possessions, they should not possess you. [13, 32]

Although the charge of temporal affairs seems to be and is distracting, I have no doubt that by your good and upright intention you turn everything you do to something spiritual for God's glory. For the distractions which you accept for His greater service, can be not only the equivalent of the union and recollection of uninterrupted contemplation, but even more acceptable to Him proceeding as they do from a more active and vigorous charity. [2383, 255]

As to the instruments we must use, besides good example and prayer that is full of desires, we must consider whether to make use of confession or spiritual exercises and conversations, or teaching catechism, or lectures, sermons, and so forth. [Ap 1:24, 268]

We should make use of a holy prudence in adapting ourselves to all. This prudence will indeed be taught by the unction of the Holy Spirit, but we ourselves can assist it by reflection and careful observation. The examination of conscience could be extended to include this consideration, and it should be made at a fixed hour of the day. [Ap 1:24, 269]

As to that blindness or dryness of soul which you think you find in yourself, it may easily come from a lack of confidence, or pusillanimity, and consequently can be cured by its contrary. [4020, 316]

Above all, remember that God wishes to find solid virtues in us, such as patience, humility, obedience, abnegation of our own will—that is, the good will to serve Him and our neighbor for Him. His providence allows us other devotions only so far as He sees that they are expedient for us. But as they are not substantial, they do not make us perfect when they abound, nor imperfect when they are absent. [4020, 317]

Try to put yourself into the hands of Christ our Lord by conforming your own will entirely with His, including a readiness to follow Him in the trials He underwent in this world when He wishes to share them with you, so that you can follow Him later in the glory of the other world. Then, I have no doubt,

your trials will cease in great measure, and your fortitude in bearing them will be so great that you will hardly notice them. [4054, 319]

If there is any sure way in this world to escape trials and affliction of spirit, it is to force our own will into a perfect conformity with God's. For if He has complete possession of our heart, we will not be able to lose it against our will. And nothing can greatly afflict us, since all affliction is born of having lost, or of fearing to lose, what we love.[4094, 322]

Do not be afraid of the magnitude of the undertaking as compared you're your slender resources, since all of our sufficiency must come from Him who calls us to this work. It is He who must give you all that is required for His service. [4645, 343]

This disquiet comes from within and not from without. I mean from your lack of humility, obedience, and prayer, your slight mortification, in a word your little fervor in advancing in the way of perfection. You might change residence, superiors, and community, but if you do not change the interior person, you will never do any good. You will everywhere be the same, unless you succeed in being humble, obedient, devout, and mortified in your self-love. This is the only change you should seek. Every month write me a few lines on how you are getting on with your humility, obedience, prayer, and the desire for perfection. [5130, 363]

Being pilgrims on this earth as we are, with our lasting city in the kingdom of heaven, we should not consider it a great loss when those whom we love in our Lord depart a little before us. For we shall follow them before long to the place where Christ our Lord and Redeemer has prepared for us a most happy dwelling in His bliss. [5313, 379]

If you can get people to make the Exercises and give them a taste for prayer and meditation and spiritual things, this will be the most efficacious means of all to get them to think less of and even to abandon the extreme views which they entertain concerning material things. [Ap Eth: 2, 383]

God is well pleased with the earnestness and moderate anxiety with which we attend to our obligations, but He is not pleased with that anxiety which afflicts the soul, because He wishes our limitations and weakness to seek the support of His strength and omnipotence, with the trust that in His goodness He will supply what is lacking to our weakness and shortcomings. [5919, 404-5]

If you are involved in much business, even though your intention be good and holy, you must make up your mind to do what you can, without afflicting yourself if you cannot do all that you wish. Do all that a person

ought to do who follows the dictate of a good conscience. You must have patience and not think that God our Lord requires what humans cannot accomplish, nor that He wishes you to be cast down. [5919, 404-5]

There is no need to wear yourself out, but make a competent and sufficient effort, and leave the rest to Him who can do all He pleases. [5919, 404-5]

Let it be enough for us to do what we can according to our weakness, and be willing to leave the rest to Divine Providence, whose business it is. People do not understand the course of Divine Providence, and as a result sometimes afflict themselves when they really should be glad. [6110, 413]

If you have true humility and submissiveness, your scruples will not cause so much trouble. The fuel they feed on is a kind of pride—one which places more reliance on one's own judgment and less on the judgment of others whom we trust. [6615, 430]

It is really enough to strike one with terror to have anything to do with prophecies when one sees a person of such prudence and learning (and as far as we can see of great virtue and devotion) misled, especially when he was willing to submit to such tests to make sure that his spirit was of God. And yet he was mistaken. [Ap. 6:3, 198]

Repression can be done in two ways. One, when the reason enlightened by God becomes aware of a movement of sensuality against God's will, yielding to which would be a sin, and you repress it through the fear and love of God. This is well done, even though some weakness should ensue or some bodily ill, since sin should not be committed for this or any other reason. There is another way of repressing this sensuality. You may be looking for some recreation, or anything else that is perfectly lawful, in which there is no sin, but out of a desire for mortification or love of the cross you deny yourself what is sought. This second way or repression neither good for all, nor should it be used at all times. Rather, at times there will be more merit in taking some honest bodily recreation in order to be able to remain active for a long period in God's service than in repressing oneself. [6699, 435]

We should not conceal our temptation, nor even our good thoughts, but make them known to our confessor or superior, because "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (Phil 4:5). We should always act according to the judgment and counsel of our spiritual director rather than our own, which we should always regard rather with suspicion. [Ap 6:11, 441]

Let no one seek to be considered a wit, or to affect elegance or cleverness or eloquence, but look upon Christ, who made nothing at all of these things. He

chose to be humbled and despised by people for our sake rather than to be honored and respected. [Ap 6:11, 440]

Should you do anything that is disedifying, and it seems as a result you should be held in less esteem than you were held before, don't be so discouraged as to wish to give up, but humble yourself and ask forgiveness of those who might have been scandalized by your bad example and a penance from your superior. You should give thanks to God, who has permitted you to be humbled, so that you can be known by all for what you are. You should not wish to appear better in the eyes of others than you are in the eyes of God. [Ap 6:11, 440]

We should never postpone a good work, no matter how small it may be, with the thought of later doing something greater. [Ap 6:11, 441]

In all spiritual associations I should try to make one step of progress safely, and prefer this to making a hundred steps by putting myself in danger, or to help someone at the cost of a serious difference of opinion with him or her, even though I may have been right. [Ap 6:12, 442]

A scandal, whether it has foundation or not, does us more harm and neutralizes more than half the progress which God our Lord accomplishes through us. [Ap 6:12, 442]

Those who are wise judge it to be true prudence not to rely on their own judgment, especially when personal interests are at stake, in which people usually are not good judges because of their lack of self-control. [295, 169]

DISCERNMENT

It will be profitable and quite necessary to submit the spirits to a close examination. For this God our Lord, as in a matter of importance, gives His servants special grace, freely given, for the discernment of spirits, according to the Apostle (1 Cor 12:1f). And this grace works and is helped by our activity, especially our prudence and learning. [Ap 6:3, 197]

[Note: 1 Cor 12:1f asserts that it is the Holy Spirit who gives spiritual gifts.] [Also, Ig asserts that it is "our Lord" who moves us here and there. (See here and there in these writings.)]

I desire to be reminded hourly and to live with this recollection: In matters of extraordinary importance the good angels tend to be very much alert to strengthen and build up, and the evil spirits to weaken and destroy. [Ap 6:1, 130]

Certain it is that an upright life is very important in such discerning of spirits. [Ap 6:3, 200]

Signs of God's Work

It is characteristic of God our Lord to wish to give us greater graces than we are ready to receive and to dispose us to desire and hope from His divine liberality that He will fulfill and even surpass our hopes and desires. [1553, 315]

It is also a sign that one's spirit is good if it leads to the loving observance of all a person's obligations in the service of God our Lord, just as it seems to be an evil spirit that leads to the opposite. [Ap 6:3, 203]

The mortification of spiritual vices, such as ostentation and vainglory, is a sign of the good spirit; and when we see that these appetites are not mortified, we take it as a sign of the evil spirit. [Ap 6:3, 203]

It is God's way to give understanding, not take it away; to give hope rather than mistrust. [6,17]

The gifts which have His Divine Majesty as their end are:

an increase on the intensity of faith, hope, and charity,
joy and spiritual repose,
tears, intense consolation,
elevation of mind, divine impressions and illuminations,
together with all other spiritual relish and understanding which have these gifts as their objects, such as humble reverence for our holy Mother the Church, its rulers and teachers.

Any of these gifts should be preferred to exterior and visible manifestations. Without [these gifts] all our thoughts, words, and actions are of themselves tainted, cold, disordered; while with them they become clear and warm and upright for God's greater service. [466, 179]

The Lord usually gives an interior consolation which casts out all uneasiness and draws one to a complete love of our Lord. In this consolation He enlightens some, and to others He reveals many secrets as a preparation for later visits. In a word, when this divine consolation is present all trials are pleasant and all weariness rest. Whoever goes forward with this fervor, warmth, and interior consolation finds every burden light and sweetness in every penance or trial, however great. [7, 22]

It frequently happens that our Lord moves and urges the soul to this or that activity. He begins by enlightening the soul; that is to say, by speaking interiorly to it without the din of words, lifting it up wholly to His divine love and ourselves to His meaning without any possibility of resistance on our part, even should we wish to resist. [7,22]

After such consolation or inspiration, when the soul is still abiding in its joy, the Enemy tries under the impetus of this joy to make us innocently add to what we have received from God our Lord. His only purpose is to disturb and confuse us in everything. [7, 22-3]

It is not so much a misfortune to be deprived of temporal consolation as a blessing to have the occasion of lifting your hearts and affections to the things of heaven where He is, who, had he remained on earth, might have been able to draw them down to earth. [4921, 356]

So great is His loving kindness that, if it were good for us, He would on His part be more inclined to keep us always consoled rather than afflicted, even in this life. But as the condition of our misery in this present state requires that at times He visit us with trials instead of delights, we can see in this His fatherly and supreme mercy that He confines our trials to the brief course of this life and not without an occasional mingling of many consolations. In the life which is eternal and without end He will reward our patience with indescribable satisfaction and glory, and without any mingling of trial or sadness or dissatisfaction at all, since there is none on heaven, but only the fulfillment of every joy and happiness. [4054, 318-9]

It has given me more than a little joy in our Lord to learn from your letter matters that are drawn rather from an interior experience than from anything external—an experience which our Lord in His infinite goodness usually gives to those souls to render themselves entirely to Him as the beginning, middle, and end of all our good. [101, 83]

When God our Lord makes supernatural revelations, he usually does so for some good end and has in view some advantage for humankind. It is characteristic of these graces, freely bestowed, to be directed toward the good of the neighbor, according to St. Paul and the doctors. [Ap 6:3, 200-01]

Prophecies

An understanding apt for the prophetic gift should be clear and distinct, not merely for receiving such illuminations, but to distinguish in them what is revealed absolutely from what is revealed conditionally. It should discern

what it knows naturally from what it knows prophetically, because if they are not kept distinct one can easily be taken for the other. [Ap 6:3, 202]

People who have received such extraordinary favors from God usually take the words of Isaiah as applying to themselves, "My secret to my secret to myself" (24:16). And if they do make some things known, they do so with moderation, and only so far as they think God wishes them to or commands them to, for the edification of the neighbor. [Ap 6:3, 203-03]

Signs of the Evil Spirit

The Enemy does not care whether he speaks the truth or whether he lies. His sole purpose is to overcome us. [7, 20]

It is the way [of the Father of Lies] to suggest or propose a truth, or even several, in order to come off with a lie and entangle us in it. [790, 195]

It is a very common temptation of the Enemy to be always placing before us the perfection of things to come and bring us to make little of the present. [Ap 6:11, 441]

The Enemy usually tempts those in the desert with thoughts of dealing with the neighbors and improving them, and to those who are helping their neighbors the Enemy will propose the great perfection of the desert and solitary life. Thus the Enemy lays hold of what is far off to prevent us from taking advantage of what is at hand. [Ap 6:11, 441]

The Enemy tries to darken and confuse the delicate conscience suggesting sin where there is none, changing perfection into defect, his only purpose being to harass and make one uneasy and miserable. When, as frequently happens, he cannot induce one to sin, or even hope to do so, he tries at least to vex a person. [7,21)

The Enemy enters through the other's door and comes out his own. He enters with the other by not opposing his ways but by praising them. He acts familiarly with the soul, suggesting good and holy thoughts which bring peace to the good soul. Later he tries, little by little, to come out his own door, always suggesting some error or illusion under the appearance of good, but which will always be evil. [32, 51-2]

The Enemy tries to upset you and to interfere with your service of God and your peace of mind. In the first place he proposes and leads you on to a false humility. In the second, he gives you an exaggerated fear of God. [7, 19]

In the first place, the Enemy places obstacles and impediments in the way of those who love and begin to serve God our Lord. This is the first weapon he uses in his efforts to wound them. He asks, for instance, "How can you continue a life of such great penance, deprived of all satisfaction from friends, relatives, possessions? How can you lead so lonely a life, with no rest, when you can save your soul in other ways and without such dangers?" Then the Enemy will try his second weapon, which is pride and vainglory. He will endeavor to make you see that there is a great deal of goodness and holiness in you, and puts you in a position high above merits. [7, 19]

When our thoughts arise from ourselves, or are suggestions of our Enemy, and they lead us to fix our attention on objects that are distracting, frivolous, or forbidden, if we wish to prevent the will from taking any satisfaction in them or yielding any consent, we ought to increase [our spiritual and corporal] exercises. On the other hand, when these thoughts lose their strength and cease, their place will be taken by holy thoughts and inspirations. We should give the utmost welcome to these by opening to them all the doors of the soul. As a result there will be no further need of so many weapons to overthrow the Enemy. [466, 179]

Curiosity, rashness, and the intrusion of the self are all striking indications of the bad spirit, as their contraries would be of the good. [Ap 6:3, 204]

Indications of the bad spirit are: confusion of understanding, stubbornness of judgment, and injury to certain physical functions, especially those that are mental. The will is biased, prone neither to obedience nor to observing obligations. Pride, empty show, curiosity, and rash talking point to the presence of the spirit that has inspired them. It is a bad spirit, and should be opposed as the adversary, the Father of Lies, and the Enemy of all good. [Ap 6:3, 204]

You ought to take more recreation than you do, and not yield to any of these melancholy thoughts, which are usually encouraged by the devil in order to interfere at least with a greater good. [6110, 414]

Be on your guard against those times and occasions when you are usually attacked. Make a slight elevation of the mind to God. And above all, make a real effort to abide in His presence, recalling frequently that His Infinite Wisdom is present both to the inner and exterior person. [6303, 425]

I insist especially that you think of God as loving you, as I have no doubt He does, and that you correspond with this love and pay no attention whatever to the evil thoughts, even if they are obscene or sensual (when they are not deliberate), nor of your cowardice or tepidity. Even when we do not succeed fully, we gain much by paying no attention to them. I am not going to save

myself by the good works of the good angels, and I am not going to be condemned because of the evil thoughts and weaknesses which the bad angels, the flesh, and the world bring before my mind. [8, 25]

Making Decisions

It often happens that falsehood and truth have of themselves a direct effect on the understanding and lead us to accept or reject a proposition even before we have reasoned about it. We have reason to think that God our Lord has given us some grace of discernment of spirits, and it is to this gift more than to other causes that we attribute certain judgments. But reasoning later often confirms these judgments. [Ap 6:3, 198]

The will, which may be inclined to one side or the other, draws the understanding after it and does not leave it free to judge correctly. This is why as a rule people are not good judges in their own affairs. [Ap 6:3, 202-3]

He who gives the desire will also give understanding to see what is best fitted to obtain our end in God's service. [5248, 375]

The Holy Spirit will teach you better than anyone else the means to take to relish with affection and to put into execution with sweetness that which reason points out to be for the greater service and glory of God. It is true that reason gives us sufficient motives for seeking what is better and more perfect. And yet the will, even when this determination and execution do not precede, can easily attain it. When we place our confidence in His Providence, surrendering ourselves completely and giving up own consolation, God our Lord rewards us with a deep contentment, a relish, and all the greater abundance of spiritual consolation, especially when we do not seek it, but seek rather His glory and good pleasure alone. [6327, 417]

I have felt, and now feel, that it is God's will that I oppose this move [to accent the cardinal's hat]. Even though others might think otherwise and bestow this dignity on you, I do not see that there would be any contradiction, since the same Divine Spirit could move me to this action for certain reasons and others to the contrary for other reasons, and thus bring about the result desired by the emperor. [2652, 259]

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL COMMENTS

His Divine Majesty well knows how much and how often He has given me the sincere wish and earnest desire to be of some spiritual service, even though

it be slight, and to do what kindness I can in the Divine Goodness to all the men and women of my native land. There, God in His usual mercy bestowed on me the very beginnings of this natural life, without any merit on my part, and for which I have never been able to thank Him sufficiently. [26, 43]

According to its Institute, The Society must, so to say, have one foot on the road, ready to hasten from one place to another. [581, 186-7]

As to the Society's losing its spirit with the increase in numbers in the last three years, we believe, as far as we can reasonably judge and without the possibility of doubt in our Lord, that just the opposite is true. [Ap 6:3, 205]

Regarding calmly and with a sense of reality what I see in myself, as a result of my many sins, imperfections, and infirmities of body and soul, I have often and at different times come to the conclusion that I really do not possess (being infinitely lacking, in fact) the gifts required for the proper discharge of the office which the Society itself has laid upon me. [1154, 230]

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Remember that everything you say may or will become public. [32, 52]

Do today what you promise for tomorrow. [32, 52]

It is an ordinary experience that, where there is much contradiction, much fruit will follow. [6677, 432]

We should befriend those who are sad or tempted, speak at length and show great satisfaction and cheerfulness, both interior and exterior, so as to draw them to the opposite of what they feel, for their greater edification and consolation. [32, 52]

In dealing with people of position or influence, if you are to win their affection for the greater glory of God our Lord, look first to their disposition and accommodate yourselves to them. [32, 51]

Be slow to speak, and only after having first listened quietly, so that you may understand the meaning, leanings, and desires of those who speak. You will thus know better when to speak and when to be silent. [123, 94]

I should not cite anyone as supporting my opinion, especially if they are persons of importance, unless the matter has been well considered. And I will deal on an equal basis with all, without taking sides with any. If the matters discussed are of such a nature that you cannot or ought not to be silent, give your opinion with the greatest possible calmness and humility, and always end with the words, "with due respect for a better opinion." [123, 94]

Try as a general rule to be alert, so as to act with all humility in matters that are within the range of your ability, and do not meddle in those that are beyond your powers. God wishes each of us to serve Him within the limits of the talents He has bestowed upon us, and He is not pleased with presumption. Our spirit should not, however, for that reason underestimate itself, so that we do not undertake vigorously what is within our capacity. [Ap 8:8, 163-4]

If you think yourself a person of obedience, you should find some other way to get my decision, such as follows. Put aside your own will, which you find to be more inclined to one side than the other, and try to keep before your eyes the one and only end of the greater service and glory of God. Consider well whether your remaining in Germany would be attended with greater fruit or whether you should come here for the same end. You are to write me a letter in which you profess that you are indifferent, as far as you can

be, that you desire only to be where you can be employed for the greater service and glory of God our Lord and the Apostolic See. But at the same time that you let us know what you think is God's will for you, show yourself disposed to consider that place best which holy obedience shall appoint for you. [258, 163-4]

In dealing with another we should take a cue from the enemy who wishes to draw someone to evil: he goes in the way of the one whom he wishes to tempt, but comes out his own way. We may thus adapt ourselves to the inclinations of the one with whom we are conversing, adapting ourselves in our Lord to everything, only to come out later with the good accomplished to which we had laid our hand. [1854, 243]

It will be a very great help toward this authority [of a good reputation] not only to cultivate interior composure, but such as manifests itself exteriorly; namely, in your manner of walking, your gestures, clothing that is becoming, and above all in the circumspection of your speech, the maturity of your counsels, not only in practical matters but in speculative questions as well. This maturity will prevent you from giving your opinion precipitously if the matter is difficult. In such a case take your time to think the matter over, study the question, and even talk it over with others. [Ap 1:18, 213]

If health permits one should get accustomed to beer. [6454, 421]