

October 19

## FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT PETER OF ALCANTARA

### 179.1 First Point

When still quite young Saint Peter of Alcantara entered the Order of Saint Francis, and set about at once to imitate his Founder in the love he had for poverty. For this reason he customarily called poverty the pearl of the Gospel and caused it to flourish in the monasteries which he reformed.

The more we are poor, the more we will have the spirit of Jesus Christ, who made it his glory to be poor all through his life and who established his religion on the foundation of this virtue. The more dispoiled we are of possessions of this world and the more we renounce the comforts of life, which are the most natural reasons why people desire and love riches, the more we will share in the possession of grace and the more pleasing we will be to God. For the heart must be empty of these material creatures if we wish God to take full possession of it, as Jesus Christ said to the young man who asked him the way to be perfect.<sup>848</sup> This is why apostolic people who labored effectively for the salvation of souls, as this saint did, tried not only to have no attachment to possessions, but even to look upon them as rubbish,<sup>849</sup> according to Saint Paul's expression.

This is also what you need to do to make yourselves worthy of your work. Poverty should be so dear to you that you practice it in all things, so that as you hold on to nothing but God, you find in him what cannot be found in creatures. In this way you will be able to receive from God the fullness of grace both for yourselves and for others, and especially the love of the poor and the zeal you need to bring them completely over to God.

### 179.2 Second Point

It is impossible to appreciate how austerely this saint lived. For some twenty years he wore an undergarment made of tin. He never covered his head or his feet, and in the coldest of winter he never came near the fire. His cell was so small that he could neither stand erect nor lie at full length in it. He slept so little that he had almost overcome the need for sleep. It was by means of all these most extraordinary austerities that he became so independent of the needs of his body that it seemed he no longer had one, or that it no longer belonged to him.

The passions cannot be mastered, or the flesh prevented from revolting, unless fasting and mortification are used to bring them into subjection. This is the way that all the saints lived in order to obtain this result; you will not find any other way than this, joined to prayer; this is what Jesus Christ himself prescribes for us in the holy Gospel.<sup>850</sup>

It is quite right that the body be submissive to the spirit, but if we wish it to be so, we must take the sure means to achieve this. Take those of fasting and prayer, and if this saint cannot be your model in all that he did to mortify his body, imitate him at least in his recollection, which was so great that he never looked at the ceiling of the places where he was, and he did not know any of his religious except by the sound of their voices.

### 179.3 Third Point

This saint had a marvelous gift of prayer and he spent a great deal of time in this exercise. His recollection at prayer was ordinarily so great that it obtained for him almost continual awareness of God.

He took such delight in prayer that he had an extreme dislike for sleep, because, as he said, this was the only thing that could separate him from God's presence, something that death cannot do, because it gives the living, effective, and eternal presence of God. This saint, considering that prayer procures this happiness, used to say that a half hour of prayer should be looked upon as only a preparation for making it well.

Try to apply yourselves well to prayer in the same way this saint did by the practice of interior recollection. If you persevere in this, it will make the practice of the presence of God easy. There is nothing you should, or could, procure with more care, because it is happiness anticipated in this life, and it is also of great use to you in your work, because this work concerns God and aims at winning souls for him. It is, therefore, a matter of great consequence not to lose sight of God in your work. Make yourself as faithful to this as you possibly can.

---

Peter of Alcantara (1499 - 1562) was born in the city of Spain that is part of his name. His father was a lawyer and the governor of Alcantara. At the age of 16, Peter entered a very strict house of the Observant Franciscans at Manjarettes and was ordained in 1524. Shortly thereafter he began a series of reform efforts that became a separate Alcantarine Franciscan group, until 1897, when Leo XIII joined them to the Observants again. He also helped Saint Teresa of Avila in her reform. He was canonized in 1669, another of the saints recognized in De La Salle's lifetime. His feast is not in the current liturgical calendar.