

My Daily Life

BY
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A Personal Message from the Author

Dear Reader,

MOST people achieve some measure of fulfillment and satisfaction in daily life. They also have to cope with some degree of frustration and disappointment in their daily routine. Earthly living is certainly no paradise, but neither is it an utter hell. In one sense, life is what we make it, and in another sense, we are what we permit life to make us. Though we cannot choose all the things we would like to have in this world, we can learn to get some enjoyment and satisfaction from the things that lie within our reach. Thus, every man has a choice of surrendering to his disappointments and wallowing in self-pity, or beginning each new day with renewed attitudes and making the most of his daily circumstances and situations.

FAME, fortune, and success mean different things to different people. What they mean to each one depends on the needs, wants, preferences and prejudices which developed through his past experience, and continue to motivate him today. These appetites and emo-

tions influence his feelings, thinking and decisions more often than he realizes. Even when his intentions are good and his efforts are sincere, he can be mistaken or misguided by these inner forces. Each man has a choice of remaining fixed in his present mental, emotional and spiritual deficiencies, or of growing each day a little more fully into the kind of person he could yet become. Many will deny it, but most people would make some changes in themselves or in their personal life, if they could relive it with the wisdom they have learned from past experience. Though no man can change himself completely, every man can, with good will and reasonable expectations, achieve an appreciable progress in his desired self-renewal.

THE WORD "renewal" became extremely popular throughout the world during the years of the second Vatican Council. Everything said and done before, during and after the council, was presented to the world in the light and spirit of renewal. This renewal was intended to create in each individual a broader, more inspiring vision of his own everyday living. Through this vision, each person was to develop new attitudes toward God, him-

self, and others. It was to make him more aware of 1) his personal *commitment* to Christ's cause on earth, 2) the *unity* among all men as children of God, and 3) his duty to be a *witness* of Christ by his daily fidelity to Christian faith and principles.

TO SOME people, this kind of renewal sounds like too many changes, too many obstacles, and too much work. They feel that they are not "that religious." To them, being religious means being outstanding, as the canonized saints were. Others feel that their daily burden of personal obligations and occupations is already heavy enough, without their assuming additional burdens. These people have the idea that God and the Church may burden them beyond their present strength or resources. This is not so. God and the Church simply ask that each person consider how he may enrich his daily routine within the boundaries of his personal talents, gifts, and possibilities. As the custodian of Christian faith and morality, the Church also expects each individual to achieve enough knowledge and training to form his own conscience in time of doubt or indecision. With this inner development, the man of good will can decide

for himself, when he can or cannot extend himself beyond his present commitments. This book deals, in large part, with the human misunderstandings and natural obstacles which make this kind of self-renewal more difficult than it has to be.

DO NOT expect to read this book as you might read most other books. It is designed to give more than mere information. It offers the reader a broader understanding and deeper appreciation of human nature as it operates within him and in those with whom he must deal. It is calculated to enlarge the reader's view of human behavior and strengthen his ability to deal more realistically with others. This book tries to help the reader get the most out of daily life. It is a guide to greater peace of mind and increased spiritual vitality. Its ultimate goal is "a more satisfying self-possession and a more enlightened self-management throughout this earthly life." To absorb its message into your very being, will require time, reflection, application, and persevering practice. The paragraphs are numbered to help the reader return to a profitable insight, or to recall its place more easily. In view of this, we would recom-

mend the advice of Francis Bacon: "Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. That is, some books are to be read only in parts, others to be read, but not curiously, and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention." For this volume, we would recommend the last method of reading.

Sincerely,

Anthony J. Paone, S. J.

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PART ONE

Some Reflections on Daily Human Living

IT IS a rare man who has not at one time or another wanted to improve himself in some particular elements that marred his life-style, i.e., his personal manner of facing life and responding to its various situations. Since the second Vatican Council, Christians have been made more aware than ever of the advantages and need to renew one's own spiritual strivings for a greater possession of his inner thinking and his responses to life's daily circumstances. How adult one is, regardless of age and experience, depends on his degree of self-possession and self-management when daily life presents its demands, problems, and conflicts. This section presents an over-all view of the basic requirements for a successful daily growth toward a more self-satisfying fulfillment.

1. Man's Earthly Life
2. Man's Need of Order
3. Human Nature's Resistance to Change
4. Perspective in Daily Life
5. An Invitation to Self-Realization
6. An Effort toward Self-Renewal
7. Self-Understanding in the Effort

I Man's Earthly Life

IN ONE WAY or another along life's daily path, every man encounters some experiences which make him aware of his capabilities and limitations, his fulfillment and frustrations. Being human means having a nature which is united in some ways and divided in other ways. Of all the living creatures on earth, man alone can be both for himself and against himself at the same time. St. Paul gives a good description of this human situation in his letter to the Romans. He writes: "I cannot understand my own behavior. I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the very thing I hate . . . for though to do what is good is in me, the performance is not, with the result that instead of doing the good thing I want to do, I carry out the sinful things I do not want . . . In fact this seems to be the rule, that every single time I want to do good, it is something evil that comes to hand. In my inmost self I dearly love God's law, but I can see that my body follows a different law that battles the law which my reason dictates . . . In short, it is I who with my reason serve the law of God,

and no less I who serve in my unspiritual self the law of sin." (Romans 7: 15-25)

2 In these words St. Paul describes how man is both divided and integrated within himself. He is divided because his intelligent desires are often opposed by his unreasoning drives, urges, feelings, and emotions. He is integrated in so far as he constantly seeks his own well-being. When man acts against his better judgment, he is reaching out for what appears desirable at the time. At the same time, however, his reason may be troubling him with a sense of danger or an awareness of guilt.

3 In varying degrees, this inner division of human nature is experienced by every human being on earth. It is indeed a rare man who does not occasionally find himself torn between his unreasoning wants, feelings, and emotions on the one hand, and his intelligent desires, ideals, and judgments on the other. Within the limits of average human experience, this inner conflict is normal to human nature. In itself it is not a cause for shame or blame.

4 Since your fellow-man is subject to the same inner conflict, you will sometimes find him difficult to understand or impossible to

satisfy. In his efforts to achieve peace within himself, he may expect you to adjust to his emotional needs more than you can at the moment. The resulting interpersonal friction, be it ever so subtle, is apt to disturb you in some degree. In spite of your good will, you may adopt unwise solutions in such situations. You may try to comply with the needs or wishes of others without due regard for your own legitimate needs, limits or obligations, or you may build up unwarranted resentments toward those who merely seem to have no concern for your well-being; or finally, you may feel obliged to withdraw indiscriminately from others, and thereby lose contact with good people who might have been your friends. While each of these solutions may help when wisely applied in individual situations, they are always harmful to you when used as a general solution to all disturbing interpersonal relations.

5 Finally, this inner conflict of your human nature can cause a psychological barrier between you and God. Due to past experience, your unreasoning emotions may cast your self-image in an unfavorable light. You may see yourself as falling short of what you feel you "should be." Moreover, you may sin-

cerely feel that God thinks the same about you. On the other hand, your self-disgust may make you overly sensitive to any reminders of your real or imagined faults. In either case, your image of God will be somewhat frightening or irritating, if not downright repulsive. To make matters more difficult, the above process can occur within your mind without your awareness. Consciously, you may feel no more than some vague uneasiness in religious situations, or simply an unaccountable lack of thought, interest, or spontaneity in formal religious exercises.

6 Since this inner conflict is natural to man, it is inescapable. Every man born into this world, bears his share of it. Sometimes consciously, sometimes semiconsciously, and sometimes unconsciously, every man tries to counterbalance the disrupting effects of his conflicting needs, wants, and established habits. Though there is no perfect solution to this conflict here on earth, it is possible to diminish the emotional pressures, mental uncertainties, and moral deficiencies stemming from it.

7 A number of people seem unable, unwilling, or seriously doubtful about helping themselves in this matter. They daily attend to

most of their other needs, but in this matter of achieving peace of mind, harmony with others, and a more satisfying religious performance, they feel a certain hopelessness. Many would like a simple solution, quick results, or a perfect achievement. The thought of a planned effort over a period of time, to achieve a gradual progression toward a limited improvement, is too much for them. Consequently, they live each day dominated by the same ignorance, defects, and faults from one end of the year to the next.

8 Jesus came to earth to lead man toward his best possible self-fulfillment both here and hereafter. He does not look on this earthly life as unimportant. He does not expect you to despise the good things of this earthly life. He wants you to seek your intelligent self-fulfillment by making the most of your natural talents, opportunities, and circumstances. He does, however, urge you to look on this earthly life as your path to a fuller life with Him in heaven. Even a professed atheist sees the need of preferring some things to others for his own welfare. He tries to control his unreasoning feelings when he sees them as obstacles to his well-being. Would you be less reasonable in your daily life?

9 Though your intelligence and faith may agree with the above, you may still have misgivings about your ability to give a satisfactory religious performance in your daily life. You may need to reflect often on the truth that "God is reasonable. He will not burden you beyond your strength, nor test you beyond your endurance." Having made your human nature, God knows only too well that it will still make itself felt, in spite of all the supernatural gifts He has bestowed on you. Under the stress of your natural wants, emotional needs, and spontaneous doubts, your faith in Him will waiver at times. There will be days when you will feel utterly alone, unimportant, and even worthless. You may feel as though God is far away from you, or that He does not care about you, or even that He does not exist. You may be strongly inclined to believe your "feelings" rather than your "faith." At such times you may have a deeper appreciation of the sentiments of Jesus Crucified when He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" (Matt. 27:46) If you cannot cling to God in His glory on those days, you can surely cling to Jesus Who underwent the same human experience for your sake.