

tempt for herself, for she considers herself unworthy of spiritual peace and quiet. This is the second of the three points I referred to. The first was to show how the soul comes to perfection, and this, what she does once she has arrived.

Here is what she does. Though she feels that I have withdrawn into myself, she does not turn back. Rather, she perseveres in her exercise with humility and remains locked up in the house of self-knowledge. There, with lively faith, she waits for the coming of the Holy Spirit, for me, the flame of love. How does she wait? Not lazily, but in watching and constant humble prayer. And her watching is not only physical but spiritual as well. Her mind's eye never closes, but watches by the light of faith and with contempt tears out her heart's wandering thoughts. She watches in love of my charity, knowing that I want only her sanctification. My Son's blood stands witness to this.⁷⁴

By the very fact that her eye is watching in the knowledge of me and of herself, the soul is praying continuously. This is the prayer of a good and holy will, and this is continuous prayer. But she watches also in acts of prayer—prayer, I mean, that is made at the regular times ordained by holy Church.

This is what the soul does who has left imperfection behind and arrived at perfection. And it was to bring her to that point that I left her feelings, though in grace I never left her.

I left her so that she might see and know her shortcomings. For when she felt bereft of comfort she would feel distressed and weak, incapable of constancy or perseverance. Here she would find the root of her spiritual selfishness and have reason to know it for what it is and to rise above herself and mount the judgment seat of her conscience. She would dig out the root of selfish love with the knife of contempt for such love and with love for virtue, and would not let pass any feeling that had not been corrected by reproof.

64

I would have you know that every [good], whether perfect or imperfect, is acquired and made manifest in me. And it is acquired and made manifest by means of your neighbor. Even simple folk know this, for they often love others with a spiritual love. If you have received my love sincerely without self-interest, you will drink your neighbor's

74. Cf. Rm. 5:8. "What proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners."

love sincerely. It is just like a vessel that you fill at the fountain. If you take it out of the fountain to drink, the vessel is soon empty. But if you hold your vessel in the fountain⁷⁵ while you drink, it will not get empty: Indeed, it will always be full. So the love of your neighbor, whether spiritual or temporal, is meant to be drunk in me, without any self-interest.

I ask you to love me with the same love with which I love you. But for me you cannot do this, for I loved you without being loved. Whatever love you have for me you owe me, so you love me not gratuitously but out of duty, while I love you not out of duty but gratuitously. So you cannot give me the kind of love I ask of you. This is why I have put you among your neighbors: so that you can do for them what you cannot do for me—that is, love them without any concern for thanks and without looking for any profit for yourself. And whatever you do for them I will consider done for me.⁷⁶

My Truth demonstrated this when Paul was persecuting me and he said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"⁷⁷ For he considered Paul's persecution of my faithful ones as persecution of me.

So your love should be sincere: You should love your neighbors with the same love with which you love me. Do you know how you can tell when your spiritual love is not perfect? If you are distressed when it seems that those you love are not returning your love or not loving you as much as you think you love them. Or if you are distressed when it seems to you that you are being deprived of their company or comfort, or that they love someone else more than you.

From these and from many other things you should be able to tell if your love for me and for your neighbors is still imperfect and that you have been drinking from your vessel outside of the fountain, even though your love was drawn from me. But it is because your love for me is imperfect that you show it so imperfectly to those you love with a spiritual love.

All this comes of the failure to dig out every bit of the root of spiritual selfishness. This is why I often permit you to form such a love, so that you may come through it to know yourself and your imperfection in the way I have described.

And I withdraw my presence from you so that you will shut your-

75. S has "while the vessel is in the fountain"; C has "in me."

76. Cf. Mt. 25:40.

77. Ac. 9:4.

self up in the house of self-knowledge, where you will acquire all perfection. But then I return to you with even greater light and knowledge of my truth, so long as you give credit to grace for having been able to kill your selfish will for my sake, and do not leave off cultivating the vineyard of your soul and uprooting the thorn bushes of evil thoughts and laying the stones of virtues that are built up with the blood of Christ. These stones you will have found in your journey across the bridge of Christ crucified, my only-begotten Son. I told you, if you recall, that on the bridge (that is, my Truth's teaching) the stones of the virtues are built up with the strength of his blood, for it is by the strength of that blood that the virtues bring you life.

65 The soul, once on her way, must cross over by way of the teaching of Christ crucified, truly loving virtue and hating vice. If she perseveres to the end she will come to the house of self-knowledge, where she shuts herself up in watching and continuous prayer, completely cut off from worldly company.

Why does she shut herself up? Through fear, because she knows how imperfect she is. And through her longing to attain a genuine and free love. She sees well that there is no other way to attain it, and so she waits with a lively faith for my coming, so that she may grow in grace.

How does one come to know lively faith? By persevering in virtue. You must never turn back for anything at all. You must not break away from holy prayer for any reason except obedience or charity. For often during the time scheduled for prayer the devil comes with all sorts of struggles and annoyances—even more than when you are not at prayer. He does this to make you weary of holy prayer. Often he will say, "This sort of prayer is worthless to you. You should not think about or pay attention to anything except vocal prayer." He makes it seem this way so that you will become weary and confused, and abandon the exercise of prayer. But prayer is a weapon with which you can defend yourself against every enemy. If you hold it with love's hand and the arm of free choice, this weapon, with the light of most holy faith, will be your defense.

66 Know, dearest daughter, that if she truly perseveres, the soul learns every virtue in constant and faithful humble prayer. Therefore she ought to persevere and never abandon it—neither for the devil's il-

lusion, nor through her own weakness (that is, any thought or impulse within her own flesh), nor because of what others say. For often the devil will sit on their tongues and make them say things calculated to hinder her prayer. She must overcome them all with the virtue of perseverance.

Oh, how delightful to the soul and pleasing to me is holy prayer made in the house of self-knowledge and knowledge of me! The soul opens her mind's eye with the light of faith and with her affection steeped in the fullness of my charity made visible in the sight of my only-begotten Son, who showed it with his blood. That blood inebriates the soul. It clothes her in the fire of divine charity. It gives her the food of the sacrament that I have set up for you in the hostel of the mystic body of holy Church, the body and the blood of my Son, wholly God and wholly human, given to holy Church to be ministered by the hands of my vicar, who holds the key to this blood.

This is the hostel I had mentioned to you that stands on the bridge to dispense the food to strengthen the pilgrim travelers who go the way of my Truth's teaching, so that weakness will not cause them to fall.⁷⁸

This food gives more or less strength according to the desire of those who receive it, whether they receive it sacramentally or virtually. "Sacramentally" is when one communicates in the holy Sacrament. "Virtually" is communicating through holy desire, both in longing for communion and in esteem for the blood of Christ crucified. In other words, one is communicating sacramentally in the loving charity one finds and tastes in the blood because one sees that it was shed through love. And so the soul is inebriated and set on fire and sated with holy longing, finding herself filled completely with love of me and of her neighbors.⁷⁹

Where did the soul learn this? In the house of self-knowledge, in holy prayer. There she lost her imperfection, just as the disciples and Peter lost their imperfection and learned perfection by staying inside in watchful prayer. How? Through perseverance seasoned with most holy faith.

But do not think that such ardor and nourishment is to be had from vocal prayer alone, as many souls believe. Their prayer consists more in words than in affection, and they seem to be concerned only to

78. Cf. ch. 11.

79. *Piena solo della carità mia e del prossimo suo.*

You know that my Truth's response contained everything I have told you. I have repeated it for you in his own words so that you would appreciate how marvelous is the state of the soul who has climbed this second stair. There she experiences and absorbs such a burning love that she runs on to the third stair, that is, to his mouth, where it is clear that she has arrived at perfection.

By what way did she come? By way of his heart, that is, through the remembrance of his blood in which she was baptized once again, abandoning imperfect love for the knowledge of the hearty love she drew from seeing and tasting and experiencing the fire of my charity. Now she has arrived at his mouth, and she shows this by fulfilling the mouth's functions. The mouth speaks with its tongue and tastes flavors. The mouth takes what is offered to the stomach, and the teeth chew it, for in no other way could the stomach digest the food.

So it is with the soul. First she speaks to me with the tongue of holy and constant prayer that is in the mouth of her holy desire. This tongue has an external and an interior language. Interiorly, the soul offers me tender loving desires for the salvation of souls. Externally, she proclaims the teaching of my Truth, admonishing, advising, testifying, without any fear for the pain the world may please to inflict on her. And she adapts her enthusiastic testimony to the situation of each person she confronts.

She eats the food of souls for my honor at the table of the most holy cross.⁹⁹ In no other way and at no other table can it be eaten perfectly and in truth. And she chews it (for otherwise she could not digest it) with hatred and love, the two rows of teeth in the mouth of holy desire. There she takes this food and chews it with hatred for herself and love for virtue in herself and in others. Every sort of assault—derision, insult, slander, reproach, endless persecutions, hunger and thirst, cold and heat, pain-filled longing and tears and sweat for the salvation of souls—she chews them all for my honor as she bears with her neighbors and supports them. And after she has chewed them she tastes the flavor, savoring the fruit of her labor and the delight of this food of souls, enjoying its taste in the fire of charity for me and her neighbors. And so this food reaches the stomach (that is, the heart), which has been prepared by desire and hunger for souls to receive it

willingly, with heartfelt charity and affection for others. She delights in it and chews it over and over in such a way that she lets go of her delicacy about her bodily life in order to be able to eat this food at the table of the cross, the table of the teaching of Christ crucified.

Then the soul grows so fat on true and solid virtues and so big because of the abundance of this food that the garment of selfish sensuality (that is, the body, which covers the soul) splits apart so far as its sensual appetite is concerned. Now anyone who splits apart dies. So the sensual will is left dead. Because the soul's well-ordered will is alive in me, clothed in my eternal will, her sensual will is dead.

Now this is how the soul acts who has in truth reached the third stair. This is the sign that she has reached it: Her selfish will died when she tasted my loving charity, and this is why she found her spiritual peace and quiet in the mouth. You know that peace is given with the mouth.¹⁰⁰ So in this third stage the soul finds such a peace that there is nothing that can disturb her. She has let go of and drowned her own will, and when that will is dead there is peace and quiet.

She brings forth virtue for her neighbors without pain. Not that this is in itself painless, but the dead will feels no pain because it endures pain willingly for my name's sake.

She runs briskly along the way of the teaching of Christ crucified. Nor does she slacken her pace for any assault that may befall her, or any persecution, or any pleasure the world may offer her. All these things she overcomes with true strength and patience, her will clothed in my loving charity and enjoying the food of the salvation of souls in true and perfect patience. Such patience is a sure sign that the soul loves me perfectly and without self-interest, for if she loved me and her neighbors for her own profit she would be impatient and would slacken her pace.

But she loves me for myself, because I am supreme Goodness and deserve to be loved, and she loves herself and her neighbors because of me, to offer glory and praise to my name. And therefore she is patient and strong in suffering, and persevering.

77

These three glorious virtues—patience, courage, and perseverance—are rooted in true charity and have their place at the very top of

99. Cf. Jn. 4:34. Catherine speaks often of "eating souls," i.e., winning them to salvation. The expression *cibo de l'anime*, literally "food of souls," recurs again and again in the *Dialogue* with an ambiguity that clearly says, "The food souls feed on IS souls."

100. The "kiss of peace," a traditional exchange of the peace of Christ among Christians, ritualized in various ways in the context of the liturgy through the centuries.

prayers and sweat and tears I will wash the face of my bride, holy Church. I showed her to you earlier as a maiden whose face was all dirtied, as if she were a leper. The clergy and the whole of Christianity are to blame for this because of their sins, though they receive their nourishment at the breast of this bride! But I will tell you about those sins in another place.

87

Then that soul, restless in her great longing, rose up like one drunk from the union she had experienced with God and from what she had heard and tasted of the gentle first Truth. She was anxiously grieving over the foolishness of creatures who do not recognize their benefactor or God's loving charity. Still, she was glad in the hope of the promise God's Truth had given her when he had taught her how she and God's other servants must behave if they wished him to be merciful to the world. So she raised her mind's eye to the gentle Truth with whom she was united, because she wanted to know something about the spiritual stages God had described to her. She saw that the soul passes through these stages with tears, so she wanted Truth to show her the difference among the kinds of tears, what was their source, how they came to be,¹³⁰ what fruit was to be had from such weeping, and what different reasons there were for it. And since the truth could be known only from Truth himself, she addressed the question to him. Now nothing can be known in Truth unless the mind's eye can see it. So one who wishes to know must rise up with a desire to know by the light of faith and in Truth, and must open the mind's eye by opening its pupil, which is faith, onto the object of truth. She knew this, for she had not forgotten what God who is Truth had taught her, that in no other way than this could she learn what she wanted to know of the stages of tears and their fruits. So she rose up above her very self with a longing beyond all telling. And by the light of a lively faith she opened her mind's eye onto eternal Truth, and there she saw and knew the truth of what she had asked. For God revealed himself, that is, his kindness, to her and stooped down to her burning desire and granted her petition.

¹³⁰ The manuscripts vary from here to the end of this sentence. C omits the phrase about the fruit to be had from tears; S, E, F include a repetition of the question of source. In my translation I have opted for the best of both and left out the repetition.

TEARS

88

Then God, gentle first Truth, spoke:
 O dearest daughter whom I so love, you have asked me for the will to know the reasons for tears and their fruits, and I have not scorned your desire. Open your mind's eye wide, and I will show you, through the spiritual stages I have described for you, those imperfect tears whose source is fear.

First of all, there are the tears of damnation, the tears of this world's evil ones.

Second are the tears of fear, of those who weep for fear because they have risen up from the sin out of fear of punishment.

Third are those who have risen up from sin and are beginning to taste me. These weep tenderly and begin to serve me. But because their love is imperfect, so is their weeping.

The fourth stage is that of souls who have attained perfection in loving their neighbors¹ and love me without any self-interest. These weep and their weeping is perfect.

The fifth stage (which is joined to the fourth) is that of sweet tears shed with great tenderness.

I will tell you, too, about tears of fire, shed without physical weeping, which often satisfy those who want to weep but cannot. And I want you to know that a soul can experience all of these different stages as she rises from fear and imperfect love to attain perfect love and the state of union.

89

I want you to know that all tears come from the heart. Nor is there any other bodily member that can satisfy the heart as the eyes can. If

¹ *Nella carità del prossimo.*

the heart is sad the eyes show it. If the sadness is sensual, there will be hearty tears that give birth to death—hearty because they do come from the heart, but deadly because the heart's love is disordered, cut off from me. And because it is disordered it is offensive to me and earns sadness and tears that are deadly. It is true, however, that the seriousness of both sin and weeping depends on how disordered that love is. These, then, are those first, the tears of death, of which I have told you and will tell you more later.²

Let us look now at the first of the life-giving tears, the tears of those who recognize their sinfulness and begin to weep for fear of punishment. Their tears are heartfelt but sensual; that is, although they have not yet come to perfect hatred for sin as an offense against me, they do get up with heartfelt sorrow because of the punishment that must follow upon the sin they have committed. So their eyes weep to satisfy the sorrow in their heart.

When the soul begins to practice virtue, she begins to lose this fear. For she knows that fear alone is not enough to win her eternal life (as I told you when I spoke of the soul's second stage³). So she rises up in love to know herself and my goodness to her, and she begins to hope in my mercy. In this her heart feels glad, because her sorrow for sin is mixed with hope in my divine mercy.

Now her eyes begin to weep, and her tears well up from the fountain of her heart. But these tears are often sensual because she is not yet very perfect. If you ask me why, I answer: because of the root of selfish love. Not sensual love; she has already risen above that. No, it is a spiritual love in which the soul hungers for spiritual consolations (whose imperfection I have made clear to you) or for the consolations that come through some person she loves with a spiritual love. But let her be deprived of the interior or external consolations she loves (the interior being the consolations she drew from me, and the external those she had got through creatures). Or let temptations come upon her or let other people persecute her. Then her heart is sad, and at once her eyes, sensing the heart's pain and sadness, begin to weep in tender self-pity, a pity springing from spiritual selfishness, because she has not yet

completely put underfoot and drowned her self-will. So she sheds sensual tears, tears of spiritual emotion.

But as she grows and exercises herself in the light of self-knowledge, she conceives a kind of contempt for herself. From this she draws a bit of knowledge of my goodness, aflame with love, and she begins to join and conform her will with mine. She begins to feel joy and compassion: joy for herself because of this impulse of love, and compassion for her neighbors (as I described it for you in the third stage⁴). Then her eyes, which want to satisfy her heart, weep in charity for me and her neighbors with heartfelt love, grieving only for the offense done to me and the harm to her neighbors. For she thinks not of herself but only of being able to praise and glorify my name. And with anguished longing she finds her pleasure in feeding at the table of the most holy cross, that is, in patterning herself after the humble, patient, spotless Lamb, my only-begotten Son, of whom I have made a bridge, as I told you.

So she travels calmly over the bridge, following the teaching of my gentle Truth. She passes through this Word, enduring with true gentle patience every pain and trouble that I permit for her own good. She accepts it courageously, choosing my way over her own. And she suffers not only patiently, but gladly. She considers it a glory to be persecuted for my name's sake so that she might have something to suffer [for me]. This brings the soul to such joy and spiritual peace that no tongue could describe it.

Once she has gone along this way of my only-begotten Son's teaching and set her sights firmly on me, gentle first Truth, she comes to know what she has seen, and knowing it, she loves it. Her will, drawn along on the heels of understanding, tastes my eternal Godhead and knows and sees therein the divine nature joined with your humanity. She takes her rest then in me, the peaceful sea. Her heart is united with me in affectionate love, as I told you at the fourth and unitive stage.⁵ When she feels the presence of my eternal Godhead she begins to shed sweet tears that are truly a milk that nourishes the soul in true patience. These tears are a fragrant ointment that sends forth a most delicate perfume.

O most loved daughter, how glorious is the soul who has so truly learned to cross the stormy flood to come to me, the peaceful seal! The

2. In the general scheme of this section, there are two principal distinctions: the tears of death (or damnation) and those of life. At this point Catherine takes up in detail the latter, now numbering the tears of fear (which were second in her initial listing) as first. After all of the tears of life have been treated she returns to those of death in greater detail in ch. 93.

3. Cf. ch. 58.

4. Cf. ch. 76, 77.

5. Cf. ch. 78.

vessel of her heart is filled with the sea that is my very self, the most high eternal Godhead! And so her eyes, like a channel trying to satisfy her heart's lead, shed tears.

This is that final state in which the soul is both happy and sorrowful. She is happy because of the union with me that she has felt in experiencing divine love. She is sorrowful because she sees my goodness and greatness offended. For she has seen and tasted that goodness and greatness in her knowledge of herself, and it was this self-knowledge that brought her to this final stage. But her sorrow does not mar the unitive state. No, it brings on tears of great sweetness because of the self-knowledge she finds in charity for her neighbors. For in that charity she discovers the lover's lament of my divine mercy and sorrow for her neighbors' sins, and so she weeps with those who weep and rejoices with those who rejoice.⁶ These last are those who live in charity, and for these the soul rejoices, for she sees these my servants praising and glorifying my name.

So the second kind of weeping (the third [spiritual stage]) does not stand in the way of the last (the fourth, the second of the unitive stages).⁷ Rather, they flavor each other. For if the last kind of weeping, in which the soul found such union, had not been drawn from the second (that is, from the third stage of love for her neighbors), it would not be perfect. So it is necessary for the two to flavor each other. Otherwise the soul would become presumptuous: A subtle breeze of self-conceit would insinuate itself and she would fall from the heights down to the very depths where she first vomited out [her sin].⁸

It is therefore essential that the soul be constant in her charity for her neighbors and in true knowledge of herself. In this way she will feed the flame of my charity within her, because charity for others is drawn from my charity, that is, from the knowledge the soul gained by coming to know herself and my goodness to her, which made her see that I love her unspeakably much. So she loves every person with the

6. Rm. 12:15.

7. Catherine's numbers are obviously overlapping here. The third and fourth (last) stages of the spiritual life are, respectively, the first and second unitive stages (cf. ch. 78), and these two are inseparable, the second being simply the perpetuation of the first. Catherine herself defines, in the lines that follow, her reference to "the second kind of weeping" as the tears shed for the sins of others. The "first" kind are those of joy in the soul's union with God. This paragraph and the following are a beautiful, if frustrating, example of Catherine's sometimes convoluted logic!

8. Cf. 2 P. 2:22.

same love she sees herself loved with, and this is why the soul, as soon as she comes to know me, reaches out to love her neighbors. Because she sees that I love them even more than she does, she also loves them unspeakably much.

Since she has learned that she can be of no profit to me, nor return to me the same pure love with which she feels herself loved by me, she sets herself to repaying my love through the means I established—her neighbors. They are the ones to whom you must be of service, just as I told you that every virtue is realized through your neighbors. I have given you these to serve, every one, both in general and individually, according to the different graces you receive from me. You must love with the same pure love with which I love you. But you cannot do this for me because I love you without being loved and without any self-interest. And because I loved you without being loved by you, even before you existed (in fact it was love that moved me to create you in my own image and likeness) you cannot repay me. But you must give this love to other people, loving them without being loved by them. You must love them without any concern for your own spiritual or material profit, but only for the glory and praise of my name, because I love them. In this way you will fulfill the whole commandment of the Law, which is to love me above all things and your neighbor as your very self.⁹

It is true, then, that no one can attain this height without this second state.¹⁰ In other words, the third and second states become one, and the perfection the soul has reached cannot be maintained if she lets go of the love that produced the second kind of tears. Just so, it is impossible to fulfill the law concerning [love for] me, God eternal, apart from [the law concerning love for] your neighbors. These are the two feet of affection on which you must follow the commandments and counsels given you by Christ crucified.

In this way these two states joined into one nourish the soul in virtue and union with me. Not that the one state changes for being joined with the other. On the contrary, it increases the richness of grace by new and different gifts and a wonderful spiritual exaltation, with a knowledge of the truth that although you are mortal you seem in a

9. Cf. Mt. 22:37-40.

10. The "second and third" states referred to here are the two kinds of "perfect tears," those of joy in the soul's union with God and those of sorrow for the sins of others.

sense immortal, because your selfishly sensual emotions are dead and your will is dead because of your union with me.

Oh, how sweet is this union to the soul who experiences it! For in the experience she sees my secrets, and from this she may often receive the spirit of prophecy, knowing the future. It is my goodness that does this. Nonetheless, the humble soul should always spurn such gifts—not the gift of my loving charity,¹¹ but her hankering after her own consolation. She should count herself unworthy of spiritual peace and quiet, and rather nourish virtue within herself. Nor should she rest in her union with me,¹² but rather return to the valley of self-knowledge.

I grant the soul this grace and give her this light to make her continue to grow. For the soul is never so perfect in this life that she cannot become yet more perfect in love. My beloved Son, your head, was the only one who could not grow in any sort of perfection, because he was one with me and I with him. His soul was beatified in his union with my divine nature.¹³ But you, his pilgrim members, can always grow to greater perfection. Not that you would advance to another stage once you had reached that final [state of union with me]. But you can make that very union grow in whatever kind of perfection you choose with the help of my grace.

90

Now you have seen the different kinds of tears and the differences among them, as it has pleased my truth to satisfy your desire.

The first kind of tears, the tears of those who are dead in sin, come from a heart that is corrupt. Now the heart is the source of all emotion, which in turn is the source of tears. So because these persons' heart is corrupt, the weeping that comes from it is corrupt and wretched, and so are all their actions.

The second kind of weeping is that of souls who are beginning to know their own sinfulness through the punishment that must be their lot after sinning. This is a common sort of beginning that I in my kindness grant to weak souls who like fools are drowning down there in the

11. C has here: "not the effect of my gift of charity," but *effeto* is erased in the manuscript. I have followed the more logical *affeto* of S.

12. Literally, *nel secondo stato*, i.e., the second of the two most perfect stages, that of union.

13. In the theology of Catherine's day, the human soul of Jesus enjoyed the beatific vision from his conception.

river because they shun my Truth's teaching. There are so very many who come as far as this sort of self-knowledge. Without slavish fear of their own punishment they would perish. Some, in a sudden great contempt for themselves, come to consider themselves deserving of punishment. There are others who give themselves in wholesome simplicity to serving me their Creator because they are sorry they have offended me. Those who go the way of great self-contempt are, it is true, more apt to reach perfection than the others. Bath will reach it if they exert themselves, but the former will get there sooner. The first sort must take care not to rest in their slavish fear. The others must watch out for repidity, for if they do not exercise their simplicity it will grow lukewarm within them. This is an ordinary sort of calling.

The third and fourth kinds of weeping belong to those who have risen above fear and attained to love and hope. They taste my divine mercy and receive from me many gifts and consolations, and because of these things their eyes, responding to the heart's emotion, weep. This weeping is still imperfect, because it is mixed with weeping that is spiritually sensual. But if these souls exercise themselves in virtue they reach the fourth stage, where, because their desire has grown, they so unite themselves with my will that they can no longer desire anything but what I will. They are clothed with a charity for their neighbors that gives birth in them to a lover's lament that I am offended and their neighbors hurt.

Such weeping is one with the fifth sort, that of ultimate perfection. Here the soul is united with Truth and the flame of holy desire burns more fiercely within her. The devil flees from this desire and can no longer persecute the soul—not by assailing her, because love for her neighbors has made her patient, nor by using spiritual or temporal consolations, because she would spurn such things in contempt and true humility.

It is indeed true that the devil never sleeps but teaches you, if you are careless, to sleep when it is profitable to him. But his watching cannot hurt these perfect souls, for he cannot stand the heat of their charity, nor the fragrance of their soul's union with me, the sea of peace. No, the soul cannot be tricked so long as she remains united with me. So the devil flees like a fly from a boiling caldron, because he is afraid of the fire. If the soul were lukewarm he would enter fearlessly—though often enough he perishes there when he finds it hotter than he had imagined! So it happens with the soul when she first reaches perfection. The devil comes in, because she seems to him to be lukewarm,

with different sorts of temptations. But if the soul has the least bit of knowledge and heat and hatred of sin, she resists him, binding her will steadfast with the chains of hatred for sin and love for virtue.

Let every soul rejoice who suffers many troubles, because such is the road that leads to this delightfully glorious state. I have told you before that you reach perfection through knowledge and contempt of yourself and knowledge of my goodness. And at no time does the soul know herself so well, if I am within her, as when she is most beleaguered. Why? I will tell you. She knows herself well when she finds herself besieged and can neither free herself nor resist being captured. Yes, she can resist with her will to the point of not giving her consent, but that is all. *Then* she can come to know that [of herself] she is nothing.¹⁴ For if she were anything at all of herself, she would be able to get rid of what she did not want. So in this way she is humbled in true self-knowledge, and in the light of holy faith she runs to me, God eternal. For by my kindness she was able to maintain her good and holy will steadfast when she was sorely besieged, so that she did not imitate the wretched things that were vexing her.

You have good reason, then, to take comfort in the teaching of the gentle loving Word, my only-begotten Son, in times of great trouble, suffering, and adversity, and when you are tempted by people or the devil. For these things strengthen your virtue and bring you to great perfection.

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I have told you about perfect and imperfect tears, and how they all come from the heart. Whatever their reason, they all come from this same vessel, and so all of them can be called "heartfelt tears." The only difference lies in whether the love is ordered well or ill, is perfect or imperfect.

I still have to tell you, if I would fully answer your desire, about some souls who want the perfection of tears though it seems they cannot have it. Is there another way than physical tears? Yes. There is a weeping of fire, of true holy longing, and it consumes in love. Such a soul would like to dissolve her very life in weeping in self-contempt and for the salvation of souls, but she seems unable to do it.

14. *Pró cognoscere se non esse*—a reflection of that central motif: "I am who I am; you are the one who is not."

I tell you, these souls have tears of fire. In this fire the Holy Spirit weeps in my presence for them and for their neighbors. I mean that my divine charity sets ablaze with its flame the soul who offers me her restless longing without any physical tears. These, I tell you, are tears of fire, and this is how the Holy Spirit weeps. Since the soul cannot do it with tears, she offers her desire to weep for love of me. And if you open your mind's eye you will see that the Holy Spirit weeps in the person of every one of my servants who offers me the fragrance of holy desire and constant humble prayer. This, it seems, is what the glorious apostle Paul meant when he said that the Holy Spirit weeps before me the Father "with unspeakable groaning" for you.¹⁵

So you see, the fruit of these tears of fire is no less than that of physical tears of water. In fact, it is often more, depending on the measure of the soul's love. Such a soul should not be confounded, then, nor think she has lost me because she longs for tears and cannot have them in the way she wishes. She should rather want them in harmony with my will, bowing humbly to yes or no, whichever pleases my divine goodness. Sometimes I prefer not to grant her physical tears in order to make her stand constant in my presence, humbled and tasting me in continual prayer and longing. For if she had what she was asking for, it would not be as profitable to her as she thinks. She would be content to have what she had wanted, and the affection and longing with which she had asked me would slacken off. So it is not to cut her down but to make her grow that I refrain from giving her actual physical tears. Instead I give her spiritual tears, tears of the heart, full of the fire of my divine charity. These are pleasing to me in any situation and any time, so long as the mind's eye, enlightened by faith, never closes out the loving sight of my Truth. For I am the doctor and you the patients, and I prescribe for each of you what is necessary for your health and growth toward spiritual perfection.¹⁶

This is the truth about the five stages of tears, which I, eternal Truth, have explained to you, my sweetest daughter. Drown yourself, then, in the blood of Christ crucified, the humble, tormented, spotless Lamb, my only-begotten Son. Keep growing in virtue, so that the fire of my divine charity may be fed within you.

15. Rm. 8:26.

16. This concept of God's providence is further developed in ch. 142-145.