

St. Bernard of Clairvaux On Love...

"Love is sufficient of itself, it gives pleasure by itself and because of itself. It is its own merit, its own reward. Love looks for no cause outside of itself, no effect beyond itself. Its profit lies in its practice. I love because I love; I love that I may love. Love is a great thing so long as it continually returns to its fountainhead, flows back to its source, always drawing from there the water which constantly replenishes it.

Of all the movements, sensations and feelings of the soul, love is the only one in which the creature can respond to the Creator and make some sort of similar return, however unequal though it be. For when God loves, all he desires is to be loved in return; the sole purpose of his love is to be loved, in the knowledge that those who love him are made happy by their love of him."



Resources for this pamphlet:

www.catholic.org/saints

Catholic Encyclopedia: www.newadvent.org

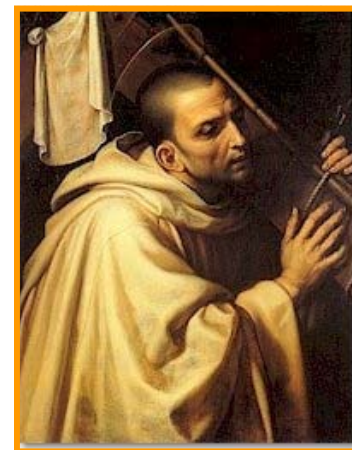


"In dangers, in doubts, in difficulties, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let not her name depart from your lips; never suffer it to leave your heart. And that you may more surely obtain the assistance of her prayer, neglect not to walk in her footsteps. With her for a guide, you shall never go astray; while she holds your hand, you cannot fall; under her protection you have nothing to fear; if she walks before you, you shall not grow weary; if she shows you favor, you shall reach the goal."

St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Evangelization and the Lives of the Saints

St. Bernard of Clairvaux



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“Clairvaux - the Valley of Light”; how fitting a name for the abbey of one who enlightened not only the faithful of the 12th century, but of many centuries to come.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux was born in 1090 to a family who believed, from the mouth of a sage, that Bernard was destined for greatness. He was sent at age nine to a very distinguished school, and excelled in his studies. Having overcome several trials and temptations in his youth, he became determined to lead a life of contemplation and isolation from the world. To this end he joined the Cistercians, a monastic order based on Benedictine theology. He eventually was given charge of the Abbey at Clairvaux, and he reinstated the Benedictine rule with such fervor that he literally made himself sick! Still, he believed strongly in the fruits of such devotion, and his piety drew many new recruits to the order.

His wisdom and knowledge were so evident that he was soon sought after to mediate disputes between clergy and statesmen, and even at one time named the true pope when two were elected as the result of a schism. After his validation by St. Bernard, Pope Innocent II passed by Clairvaux and was received with grace and humility by the monks there. *“In the refectory only a few common fishes were found for the Pope, and instead of wine, the juice of herbs was served for a drink... It was not a table feast that was served to the Pope and his followers, but a feast of virtues.”* (Catholic Encyclopedia).

Sadly, in spite of many spiritual victo-

ries over the years, one of his final battles ended in defeat. Pope Eugenius III (a former student of the Abbot's) asked St. Bernard to undertake a Second Crusade; and though he accepted the task, the logistics proved overwhelming, and it was unsuccessful. He partly blamed himself, although his work was beyond reproach. St. Bernard of Clairvaux was named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius VIII, and his sermons, treatises and other written works are still a true light to those who seek total devotion to Christ.

- *“My merit comes from his mercy; for I do not lack merit so long as he does not lack pity. And if the Lord's mercies are many, than I am rich in merits.”* Here St. Bernard shows true humility, for he acknowledges that all his merit originates in God's mercy. Humility is not necessarily saying that we are worth nothing—it is understanding that the gifts and merits we have come from God. Today, take an honest inventory of your abilities: are you creative, or do you possess organizational skills? Are you gifted in music or art? Do you write well, or can you teach? Let us thank God for the good He has worked in each of us, and use what He has given us to help build His Kingdom.

- St. Bernard was very hard on himself in spiritual practices, recognizing, as did St. Paul, that there is value in training. How well do we discipline ourselves when it comes to prayer? Even if we are tired, or very busy, taking time to stay connected to God is of the utmost importance. There is always time to offer up a brief prayer, or our tiredness itself; always time to whisper a small devotion; always time to ask the Holy Spirit what to do in a given situation; always time to lift our eyes and hearts heavenward. Just as we should not



neglect our human relationships, we cannot neglect our relationship with Christ.

- *“There are three ways for wisdom or prudence to abound in you: if you confess your sins, if you give thanks and praise, and if your speech is edifying. Man believes with his heart and so he is justified. He confesses with his lips and so he is saved. In the beginning of his speech the just man is his own accuser, next he gives glory to God, and thirdly, if his wisdom extends that far, he edifies his neighbor.”* How true! St. Bernard is teaching a sure path to wisdom: acknowledge our sin; thank God for His blessings; and be a shining light to others with our words and actions. Why not take time each day to offer a simple prayer doing just that: “Merciful Father, forgive me for any way in which I may have offended You or hurt the Body of Christ this day. I praise you and thank you for your tender love and mercies. By some small word or deed, please let this same love overflow from my heart to another soul. Amen.”
- *“I assure you, my brothers, that even to this day it is clear to some that the words which Jesus speaks are spirit and life, and for this reason they follow him. To others these words seem hard, and so they look elsewhere for some pathetic consolation. Yet wisdom cries out in the streets, in the broad and spacious way that leads to death, to call back those who take this path.”* Where do we look for our consolation? Everyone has trials and problems in their life, and sometimes it seems so easy to follow “the way of the world”. But we have a Savior who suffered what we suffer, and who offers us a love that cannot be rivaled. Let us listen to St. Bernard of Clairvaux and remain on the path which leads to Christ, and to look to Him for all our consolation.

Amen!