

THE LABORATORY OF THE HEART

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THE LABORATORY OF THE HEART

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THE LABORATORY OF THE HEART

The scriptural quotation on the *calendar, the one provided for today, June 20, is from the Epistle of James:

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

What is the power in us that provides the energy which transforms hearing into doing? Every person has this power because he carries around with him his own laboratory, wherein he transforms what he hears—or what he reads, which is practically the same thing—into, hopefully, what he does; this is a hope, providing a person is reading and hearing constructively. The same principle holds true in any case that what a person hears, sees, and reads, he incorporates into his own habits and character, especially if he absorbs his environment with his heart—not only grasps with his mind but accepts with his heart. He learns most effectively by the heart. The secret place

*The Church Calendar 1951

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of this laboratory, therefore, is your own heart. It is there that you take the words you hear, the sentences you read, the observations you make, and transform them into your own circle of activities; into your own thoughts, words, and deeds. Every person, every one of you, carries within himself this laboratory to use constructively or destructively upon his own life and world.

Because of this state of affairs, when the Lord came into the world and assumed our natural state, He took the heart to serve as a supernatural laboratory. He has thus provided for us that we too may participate in our own laboratory, which means to participate also in His laboratory. Every one of us has a heart and faculties, for we have a will and we have a mind. Those are our highest faculties; they are powers of the soul, the powers of activity, the powers of sensation; and we have all of these.

But it is from the heart that there issues forth into nature all that is provided by the heart. From the heart comes the volition that flows forth into thoughts, words, and deeds.

It is by our own hearts that we hear the word of truth. And instead of letting this word go into one ear and out of the other, we take it at once into the center of our being—our heart. From there we let it issue forth—first through our thoughts; then, perhaps, through our speech; and finally through our actions.

We have been speaking to you all this month of the mystery of the Sacred Heart, and—according to the illustration we have provided for this month's instruction—the divine Heart as a transforming energy: the Sacred Heart, where divine and human love meet for a hypostatic union.

It is also in your own heart that the divine and the human love meet; because what you have in your heart you have all through your system. It is comparable to the circulation of the Precious Blood, of which we will speak during the coming month of July.

The human heart, even as the Sacred Heart, is the transforming laboratory wherein the love of God and the love of man meet. We have given you the examples of this through the revelations of Saint Mechtilde, who tells us

of the four beats of the Sacred Heart: first, of the three divine beats — wisdom, power, and mildness; and second, of the fourth beat — fainter because it is the human beat, and yet to us, who are human, the most audible — this fourth beat which has the special name of kindness. Thus it is always as kindness that the love of God issues forth into the world. How wonderful it would be if we could all transform our spiritual instruction into human kindness!

Frederick William Faber, recognizing the vital importance of kindness, has described in his *Spiritual Conferences the manifesting departments of this virtue in the human sphere of life: from the spirit of kindness in the heart proceeds kindness in thought, kindness in speech, and kindness in action. When you hear the words of truth in what form do they issue forth through your thoughts, words, and deeds? Do they become harsh judgments, severe criticism, thoughtless manners, or careless conduct? Do you desecrate the laboratory

*Spiritual Conferences,
by Frederick William Faber,
pages 17-78

of your heart by bringing forth what ought not to be, or do you use this laboratory as God intended? When you hear the words of truth, or you read its message, do you transform the words and message into activity in your own life; do you bring them to life through your acts of kindness?

Where is this transforming power? We speak of it as being in the will, as acting under our consent. Yet we cannot stop the procession of truth by giving or by not giving consent to it; however, we do participate in its benefits best by our acceptance of it. How wonderful and how instructive that the consent of the Virgin was sought for the Incarnation! Do you imagine for a moment that the omnipotence of God was bound to the will of any human being? Yet God in His kindness sought the consent of the Holy Mother.

In the same way He seeks your consent, not because He is bound by it but because He has provided you with a free will. And this free will is to be used as personal volition. Will is your volition given for rational use; consequently when knowledge touches the heart

volition becomes rational choice, even as with the virgin her consent was entirely rational. Her consent was sought as the congruity whereby the Word of God became visible, active, and manifest in human life.

So, because you have been given choice, the consent of your nature is asked, is sought after, to bring into manifestation the word of truth in your own life. Your heart is used as a laboratory in which words of truth come to visible expression in experience. Do you see what a responsibility rests upon you? A responsibility to truth, a responsibility to bear God in your own body and to bring Him forth into active life!

Now this laboratory, your own heart: If it is set up on its own principles and presumes to be self-sufficient, it tends to fall short of its full and complete working operation. For this reason we are provided with the perfect and complete Master-laboratory, a super-transforming energy, the Sacred Heart. Thus our own laboratories, when they submit to God's supreme laboratory, fulfill the purpose of God's love, and our own love flows forth into the

world as divine kindness in thoughts, words, and deeds.

That we might have this wonderful laboratory provided for us; that we might have the will of God done on earth — "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" — and that this might not be simply a hollow and empty petition, the Lord Himself, through His own heart, provided the means by which the will of God could be done on earth, and by which we ourselves, through our own individual laboratories in association with the supreme laboratory, might have the will of God done in our affairs.

Now this means submission; it means the submission of one's own will, because the will is the place of volition; and it is said that if we can discipline the will we can discipline the whole man. The place of discipline is in the will, the place of obedience is in the will, the place of submission is in the will; and the seat of the will is the heart. It has been arranged that this will should remain free, to choose submission, to choose obedience, to choose the supreme good, to choose the responsibility —

not to have the choice forced upon it.

How often are people given wonderful gifts which they will not accept because they do not want the responsibility! This, the economists and sociologists say, is the whole trouble with the world today — people refuse to accept responsibility. Do you refuse to take the responsibility of truth and bring it forth in your thoughts, words, and deeds? Do you seek the easy carefree way, the way that does not assume any responsibility? If you have submitted your laboratory to the supreme laboratory of the Sacred Heart, that transforming Heart, you must assume the responsibility for the gifts God has granted you.

Acceptance of the Gospel of Christ makes one responsible to its message. Religion is not proposed as an escape from responsibility; it is not provided as a means to careless life; rather the acceptance of truth provides a strength to assume and meet responsibility. Every word of truth you hear, every lesson you listen to becomes a responsibility in your heart. This does not mean, however, results classified as objective demonstrations. The accidental phe-

nomena of the supernatural is not the criterion of truth. I have heard people in this folly say, "Well, I have not demonstrated prosperity, I have not demonstrated health or success; therefore I have failed as a student of truth."

The manifestation of truth is not judged by the accidental external, but is always first recognized as an internal glory. Your true wealth is the spiritual value perceived in life, your true health, the rational balance expressed in the manner in which you meet situations and conditions of the world. Your responsibility to truth is tested best in times of adversity. If we never had moments of adversity, how could we know our spiritual riches? It is easy enough to be generous and kind, faithful and happy, when the world is treating you right, when affairs are kind to you. It is when adversities strike that we are put to the real test, that we are aware of our full responsibility to truth; that is when we have the structure of our hearts exposed.

Saint Catherine of Sienna explains that when man fell, his condition in life needed to be suited to his inner state; so when he turned

away from God, away from the light and the goodness of truth, and sought instead created good; when he looked to darkness rather than to light, and thought that darkness was light; when he turned away from God — which of course is an act of the will — when this took place, God conditioned the world to man's fallen state — an act of His providence and wisdom. Instead of leaving man in the wondrous creation which is his proper abode — and there is no question about his proper place — instead of leaving him in a garden that would fulfill all his desires, God conditioned man's world to his lowered state of experience. That is, He let the thorns of tribulation and adversity come out on the rose bushes of the garden; He permitted unsatisfying conditions in the world — these conditions which we call adversities, limitations, personal restrictions. He permitted them that the world might repel rather than draw the heart of man; because man cannot be satisfied with imperfection; man must ultimately seek fulfillment in God rather than in the world. So God permitted this world to be no longer a garden of fulfilled desire, but a

desert. Thus even the world argues for trust and confidence in God only. God wisely let man feel the thorns of this world in order to convert him from temporal to eternal good; even today man turns to God as his Saviour when the world fails to provide satisfactory security.

Why do you have so many adversities? You are always asking that question, "Why should I have adversities?" If you simply view the subject with logic alone you will discover that by this device the world is exposing its own nothingness; there is only one sure way to obtain happiness and find security and that is in truth; trust and confidence must be in God.

If the world fulfilled your every need and satisfied your every desire, you would never look beyond the temporal good. It stands to reason that you would settle complacently into your sense satisfactions. Just as did the followers of the master in the ancient classic. He provided them a magic city in which to rest on their journey, but when he called them to go on, they said, "Why should we leave here? We have everything we need here; we are

comfortable, all our desires are fulfilled; why 'should we go on into the unknown?' It was only when the thorns became visible and the tribulations and adversities corrupted the magic that the pilgrims began again to look for their master to deliver them. It is the same with us; we must look for something secure beyond this world and its temporal good in which to place our love and trust. This is so true. These thorns are relatively necessary; they will not let us settle too securely in a bed of roses. The thorns' sharp points prod us out of the rut of self-complacency. God will not let us be satisfied with any good less than Himself.

Therefore, as Saint Catherine of Sienna said, providence has conditioned the material world to drive us back to God. And until we have found truth and have given our fiat to divine and spiritual action in ourselves, we are not capable of knowing the perfection of the world which is our proper abode. We cannot even glimpse this kingdom of God until we have awakened to the full and complete vision of truth. Then we shall find that the false conditioning, the counterfeiting of the spiritual

world, will disappear, for it can then no longer intrigue us after we have once caught a vision of the divine essence and its glory.

We are provided, as we said before, with a personal laboratory in which the word of truth is laid hold of and thence issues forth in our thought, word, and deed; and we have a profound responsibility to this word.

If we had never heard the word of truth we should not have so great a responsibility; but every person who belongs to this instruction in truth, who has even heard a word of truth, has a vital responsibility to meet the conditions of the world with the perception of truth, that is, with the spirit of fortitude, and of patience, and of understanding — the spirit that has the ability to turn the bitter into the sweet. For this is the will of God provided for you: The beating of the divine heart in your heart produces a spiritual opportunity for you to live the true life here on earth.

As we told you, in the beatings of this divine heart — which is a supreme transforming energy — the first beat is a beat of wisdom; the second beat is a beat of power; the third beat

is the beat of mildness that turns the bitter into sweet; and the fourth beat, the human beat, is a beat of kindness that uses wisdom, and power, and mildness in the human channels of thoughts, words, and deeds of kindness. This kindness of the true heart depends not upon what the world gives to you; it is a kindness of love that pours itself out; it is a spiritual power of love which is not so much expressed in being loved as in loving. It does not depend on your neighbor's conduct toward you, but rather on the love of God that fills your heart and overflows; the responsibility of God's giving you this love to dispense through your own heart-laboratory is a privilege rather than a duty.

One of the rules given in the book called "The Heliotropium" — which means "Turning to Him," turning to God, turning our own will, this laboratory of our own hearts, the seat of our actions, of our volition, of our energies and desires — is that of turning our powers to God. This whole book deals with the subject of turning the will to God; and the author uses as his illustration the flower called the helio-

trope, which is said to follow the sun. This flower keeps turning all through the day to the sun, always turning to the sun; it follows the course of the sun in the sky. And in the same way should one's own will follow the course of the Sun of Justice.

There is a chapter in this book consisting of seven sections providing ways and means by which we may know the will of God. You hear people say, "My desire is to conform to the will of God; I do not want to do anything that is not the will of God, but how am I to know His will?" The desire is in your heart but you need to know God's will, that you may be obedient.

How are we going to know the will of God when we fail even to know our own? There is a vagary about the action of will; it often superimposes our own desires on the will of God! You, I am sure, have found this to be common practice — what you have set your heart on you judge God to have decreed. Instead of using what God decrees for you to be your desire; instead of using the transforming energy of your will rightly, you try to turn

the will of God into your desires, rather than your desires into God's decree. You should, instead, transform your own will by conforming it to truth; this is the candidate's responsibility, to do the will of God.

The Lord, when He came into the world, gave us this supreme transforming energy, His own Sacred Heart, in which He hypostatically united the will of God with the will of man. Though He showed through many of the passages preserved for us by the Evangelists that He, as man, had a human will, thus He said, "Not my will, but thine be done." He never manipulated the will of the Supreme to His own human will; He transformed His human will, stepping it up through His heart to the will of God. "Thy supreme will be done, not my human will," He said, in substance.

Even though the mind sometimes feels that the word "difficulty" is objectionable, still we do need to face conditions representing difficulties. We may deny our problems all we like but we still have to face them, for refusing to face them increases their power over us. The difficulty — let us repeat the word — the

difficulty that seems to confront a human being is to be able wisely to discern the will of God in his own affairs. This discernment is necessary because of the inclination, this human tendency, to reduce God's will to your own personal wishes and desires, and to make the Supreme will conform to what you yourself want.

So in this book, "Heliotropium," certain rules are given by which we may be able to test ourselves in this laboratory of the heart, for a laboratory is a testing place. We are able to test our desires, to see whether they are our own personal self-will or the will of God. There are seven of these testing rules — quite a long account, so we will only mention them by name and definition.

Therefore when we say in our prayers—

*"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Our sincere heart may have a guide to the knowledge of what God's will decrees.

The first rule: Whatever leads away from God is contrary to the Will of God.

*The Heliotropium ("Turning to Him"),
Jeremias Drexelius, Cf. Chapter IV,
Recognition of the Divine Will, pages 40-53

This rule seems simple enough — whatever diverts you from truth is not God's will. Honesty in this laboratory of your own heart is essential; you have to see, to weigh, to measure, and to consider, the affairs of your life, these effects that daily come into your heart — to proceed in the thoughts, words, and deeds — to test them for truth. The activities you perceive in the form of thoughts, words, and deeds, issue forth in daily life; your heart is the laboratory in which you test these activities with careful honesty.

[Anything that] leads away from God is contrary to the Will of God.

It is your responsibility to test situations to discover whether they lead to God or divert you from truth. No one can make this test for you; you have your own laboratory, and you have the rationality God has given you for such work; remember, the will of God never diverts a person from the good of truth.

Whatever attracts towards God is in accordance with the Divine Will. "For this is the Will of God, your sanctification."

(I Thess. iv. 3.)

The second rule is based on the divine Commandments, for anything that contradicts God's Commandments is contrary to God's will which decreed the Commandments.

"Thou knowest the commandments."

(Luke xviii. 20)

The Lord Himself said that He came not to break one jot or tittle of the Law. He came to fulfill and perfect the Commandments; in the Gospel, God provides us with a super-justice, a greater responsibility to the law than that provided of old by the Commandments. The Gospel disciplines the heart, while the Commandments discipline only the hand and external actions. Because the Gospel lays hold upon the heart, the responsibility to your Creator is even greater. Not only are we responsible for our speech and actions, but for the state of the heart.

The third rule is for the transforming of those conditions which look like thorns, tribulations, and adversities in this world of experience. You transform them because you are provided, in this laboratory of your own heart — this place where the divine and the

human meet — you are provided with an immunity in accordance with the third divine beat of the Sacred Heart which is called mildness; this is the divine action of sublime patience which turns the bitter into the sweet. This patience is provided for you in your laboratory if you give the fiat to the heart of Christ.

“In all things [according to Paul] give thanks; for this is the Will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you all.”

(I Thess. v. 18.)

My Saint
We have, in explanation of this third rule, the words of Saint Chrysostom, called the golden-mouthed, who was able to put into action the words of truth that were deposited in his heart. He was a doer of the word, not a hearer only; he transformed the words of truth into his own daily life; he wrote them into the dimension of his own experience. And for his divine mildness in dealing with others and events, he was frequently accused of being too lenient.

“Have you suffered some evil? . . . ”

The choice is up to you; it is according to this heart-laboratory wherein you contain the transforming energy — when knowledge has

reached the heart and become wisdom, the power of choice is yours. You may choose whether evil remains evil in your life or is turned around to work for good. It is up to you to decide how circumstances work for you — whether misfortune is going to sour you or whether it is going to bring out that divine sweetness and mildness in your nature which becomes immunity against evil, and which turns the bitter into the sweet.

“Have you suffered some evil? If you choose, it is not evil. Give thanks to God, and thou hast already changed the evil into good. This is the part of a philosophic mind.”

This is not a mere philosophy of life; it is a power that works in the laboratory of your heart — it absolutely has to be heartfelt. When one is steeped in the love of God even adversities are turned into good. All things, we are told by Paul, work together for good for them that love God; and it is up to you, in this transforming laboratory that you yourself carry around, it is up to you to make use of that mildness which is provided by the love of God; it is up to you to have that patience, that

immunity, that fortitude which will enable you to take the sting and poison out of misfortune. Even though some deadly thing, some viper, attacks you, because of this power of truth within yourself — this mildness that turns the bitter into the sweet — you transform it; for you have a heart overflowing with gratitude and with love of God. Remember, however, you do not give thanks for the adversity, but you do give thanks for this wonderful power and love within yourself. The strength, the understanding, the perception of truth, is the strength which enables you to meet adversities and to transform them into benefits on the spot.

The fourth rule: This fourth rule is offered to solve points of perplexities — and who does not have plenty of these — we are provided with a *teacher to help us meet perplexities, we may always seek counsel with our teacher in cases of perplexity and problems even as Paul — Saul, as he was called at that time — sought counsel from the teacher provided for him by the Lord. No one is without a teacher; the demand for obedience in religious life pre-

*Cf. Ibid., page 45

supposes a teacher. Paul, blinded by his illumination, sought Ananias to remove this blindness from his eyes.

God has provided, according to His providence, a rule for transmitting instruction, transmission from teacher to student. For it is said that one who sets himself up as his own teacher becomes the disciple of a fool. This is the prescribed order of instruction and it provides disciplines for both teacher and student in the form of obedience to rule which is the best part of discretion.

Every necessity is provided for in these rules. If it should happen, it states, that one is unable to seek advice or guidance of a teacher, if he has no opportunity, is not in the place where he can seek direction, what should he do? Then he has provided within himself a fifth rule which is called the exercise of reason — the fifth rule, therefore is:

... let a man reason with himself ...

Reason within yourself; everyone of us is provided with this wonderful testing ground of reasoning.

*The anxious are our
standard equipment of
reasoning.*

*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

The axioms of this Instruction offer an infallible standard whereby our reason may be sure and dependable and our judgments correct. Axiomatic reasoning secures integrity, inner honesty, sincerity of heart in all our considerations.

If, however, you let your physical desires run away with you, you will be like a person with a sluggish digestion — this is the illustration given — what his senses desire, what appeals most to his appetite, may be the very thing that is indigestible to him. This is the time to discipline and heal physical desires with pure reasoning.

It is the same with all our desires, we need to govern them according to reason. We have to be honest with ourselves, and ask, "Are these the things sought after by our physical appetites only, or are they desires that if fulfilled

would bring us closer, nearer to God, and make us more aware of God?"

Every one of these rules set forth, brings responsibility right back to you, to your own laboratory. There is no infallible external rule; it always goes back to you and to your responsibility towards truth and to your own volition. The heart is the seat of the will; and that place, when it is touched by knowledge, becomes wisdom. When knowledge reaches the heart it becomes wisdom, and draws the will from apparent good to absolute good.

The sixth rule: this is to be applied when we still find ourselves doubtful and perplexed. Father Baker, another great spiritual teacher, says that in times of great perplexity, there are two rules to follow: One is to clarify the understanding by looking honestly into the situation itself, by facing the problem; this clears away the obstacles. The second is that by your prayers you ask for the grace of God to enlighten your understanding. We speak of this because it is comparable to this sixth rule in the "Heliotropium," that when we find ourselves in a doubtful state of mind and still

feel ourselves beset by perplexities, the sure refuge is prayer. In "The Heliotropium" we are told:

. . . to beat heaven with our prayers. Prayer — honest, sincere prayer — will often solve difficulties where nothing else will. Prayer is a wish that springs from the heart; it rises from this laboratory of your own heart, where your perplexities are translated into the forms of prayers.

The seventh, and last rule is:

No one discovers the Divine Will with greater certainty than he who with entire sincerity desires to conform himself to it in all things. This desire is, in truth, the thread for unravelling the mazes of all labyrinths [of the mind].

The final sentence then sums up the whole subject:

We best learn to know the Will of God *by doing it.*

For as the Apostle James says:

*We are not to be hearers of the word only, but we are to be doers . . .

Within our own hearts we are to transform the word of truth into our thoughts, words, and deeds, that they may issue forth into the

*Cf. James 1:22

world of experience as that blessed kindness which is the love of God in action in the world.

For our meditation I am going to read from "The Heliotropium" the pure secret of God's divine will:

*"The Will of God . . . is what Christ has done and taught.

Let us take these words with us into the laboratory of our hearts and transform them into our thoughts, words, and deeds; let them issue forth into our surroundings as God's will on earth.

"The Will of God . . . is what Christ has done and taught. It is humility in conduct, steadfastness in faith, scrupulousness in our words, rectitude in our deeds, mercy in our works, governance in our habits; it is innocence of injuriousness, and patience under it, preserving peace with the brethren, loving God with all our heart, loving Him as our Father, and fearing Him as our God; accounting Christ before all things, because He accounted nothing before us, clinging inseparably to His love, being stationed with fortitude and faith at His Cross, and when the battle comes for His Name and honour, maintaining in words that constancy which makes con-

*The Heliotropium,
Jeremias Drexelius,
pages 54, 55

fession, in torture that confidence which joins battle, and in death that patience which receives the crown. This it is to endeavor to be co-heir with Christ; this it is to perform the commandment of God, and fulfill the will of the Father."

Silent Meditation

*All the Presence there is,
All the Power there is,
All the Consciousness there is,
Is *Love*, the *Living Spirit Almighty*.

GENEVIEVE BURNELL FORGEY

*Axioms: Book of Health,
by George Edwin Burnell,
page 80

