



## **Daring Practical Faith in Divine Providence**

### **Part One**

#### **Father Joseph Kentenich, *Childlikeness Before God*, 140-143**

#### **The salvation of our times is the daring of childlikeness**

Father Kentenich gave a retreat to the Bethlehem Fathers, a Swiss missionary community, in 1937. The world situation is very difficult at that time with Hitler in power on the northern borders of Switzerland and Mussolini in power on the southern border. The insights Father Kentenich gave at that time can also be applied to our present challenging time.

#### **Daring of one great thought**

Father Kentenich wanted to show: *that if knowledge alone were the answer, we would already be saints... A wise man once said that what the devil fears most is someone who has read one religious book and puts what he has read into practice... May we not say that even the devil respects a man who stands up for a just one idea? And must we not be even more emphatic when this one idea is none other than the ideal... childlikeness.*

*I want to know your one idea! (Nietzsche). We know this great idea. If we fail to make it come alive ... then the devil will have won again—by distracting us from the ultimate reality... We may just think a great and glorious thought but not live and love it. Then who on the day of judgment will be able to say... (using the words of Christ): I have completed the work you gave me to do. (Jn 17,4)—that I have truly embodied the idea which I was called to embody! We really ought to try to impress this daring of childlikeness deep into our hearts and wills until the end of our lives...*

**Thought questions:** What does the word daring mean to you? Why is daring childlikeness important?

#### **Power of the word yes**

He continued by giving an example of God's favorite word: *You have probably heard of a little Frenchman (Guido Fontgalland) ... The Holy Spirit had a great deal of influence in his life. He once asked himself: Which word must make God the happiest? He thought of the Annunciation and soon had the answer: Our Lady's fiat to the heavenly Father at the Annunciation must certainly be the word that makes God the happiest. It became immediately clear to him that the word yes is the one dearest to the Father. The daring of childlikeness: The daring comes from saying 'yes'. Our Lord spoke his yes in a difficult moment of his life: Ita Pater—Yes, Father! And his words were anticipated by Our Lady. Her: Behold the handmaid of the Lord ... fiat [let it be done to me...] (Lk 1,38) is the same yes in feminine form. It must therefore be something God desires of world history if the word yes is so dear to his heart!*

**Thought question:** Why do you think God's favorite word is yes?

#### **Living faith in divine providence**

For Father Kentenich daring is shown in: *living faith in divine providence. And don't overlook the living! How should faith in divine providence come alive? In hope and in love. You must stress this a great deal...and be reminded that faith is informed by love, (cf Gal 5,6). As it is generally understood, this word is applied to faith in divine providence: It must be living—not only in the mind and somewhat in the will but forming and transforming the whole person!*

#### **Victim of mercy vs. victim of justice**

Father Kentenich used an image from St. Therese, the Little Flower: *What term would she use to describe the daring of childlikeness, the daring yes, the daring of a living faith in divine providence... she had an expression that sums up her whole spirituality but is not so easy to grasp. She reminds us she was a victim of mercy. May I explain this a bit? We may know the term: victim of justice. It tends to conjure up the image of a vengeful God. He rages and desires sacrifice. His justice has been offended and now he wants atonement. The sea rages and*

seeks a victim<sup>1</sup>. Some imagine God the Father raging in the same way; they come to him pleading: Yes, Heavenly Father, it is true, we have offended you much too much; you must have atonement. But let the others go, I want to pay the price for them.

St. Therese preferred being a victim of mercy. What does she mean? Here the soul surrenders to God's mercy every rightful claim to Divine Mercy it has merited. The victim of mercy knows that each good work it does in the state of sanctifying grace merits some reward. But the victim of mercy does not claim these good works, does not hope in them. When the victim of mercy builds on God's love, its only claim is God's mercy.

There is a subtle shift of accent here. Make no mistake: the victim of mercy also takes his good works seriously but relies less on them than on an unlimited devotion to the mercy of God. That is the title on which the victim of mercy builds his case.

**Thought question:** What is the difference between a victim of justice and a victim of mercy?

### **Example of the book of life**

The next example Father Kentenich uses is the book of life: *...If the book of life were lost, the book in which we imagine all our good works are recorded, then the victim of justice would be devastated. How would he ever get to heaven! His claim to heaven would no longer exist; it would have been erased... But the victim of mercy would march straight into heaven even if the book were lost. Why? Because the claim upon which he builds would still exist, even if the book of life were lost. For he builds with everything he is and has on God's mercy.*

### **Heroic childlike confidence**

Father Kentenich then shows where the victim of mercy places his/her confidence: *Only in one claim—God's mercy. There is a second claim, namely his personal misery. Here you may sense that being a victim of mercy includes an incredibly heroic childlikeness. The victim of mercy offers to God every claim based on merit and deliberately builds on God's mercy, which responds when we recognize our personal weakness and misery. ...How helpless God's fatherly goodness is when confronted with the recognized and acknowledged misery of his children. Here you have an extension of the biblical passage: He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly (cf Lk 1, 52).*

**Thought questions:** Why does the misery of the child make God's fatherly goodness helpless?

Can you give an example of this from someone's life?

### **Small expressions to go through the day**

Father Kentenich gives examples of small expressions that help connect us with God through the day: *...I know many people who have the habit of saying in every need: Mater habebit curam<sup>2</sup>. They mean the same thing, only accentuate Mary's care as a concrete expression of God's mercy. Or there are expressions like: Deus providebit! [God will provide! cf. Gen 22,8]. Or: God will answer! All of these are applications of a living faith in divine providence. I could also repeat the little poem:*

*Though storm may rage, and wind may howl and lightning strike again,  
I think as does the mariner's child: My Father is at the helm!*

### **Slogan (or motto) for daily life**

Father Kentenich gave the priests a suggestion just like he would do for us today: *See if you can find such a slogan (or motto) for your own life, as individuals and as a community. It must be something that really captures this spirit (of daring) and awakens it again and again. I personally led an organization during the [First World] War which always used the motto Mater habebit curam (Mother takes care)! These words were repeated again and again, even in the most violent tumult of the war and the bloodiest days of battle. It was a simple reminder of the daring of childlikeness.*

**Thought question:** What slogan would you choose to help you have daring confidence?

*-to be continued in Part Two-*

<sup>1</sup> Johann von Schiller (1759-1805), German poet, *William Tell*, I, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Mother [Mary] will take care, a favorite saying of St. Vincent Pallotti, a catch phrase in Schoenstatt during World War I.