



Daring Practical Faith in Divine Providence

Part Three

Father Joseph Kentenich, *Childlikeness Before God*, 146-149

Introduction: In this third part, we continue with Father Kentenich's insights given at the retreat for the Swiss priests' community of the Bethlehem Fathers in 1937. In Part Two, the insight from Father Kentenich ended with looking at the fatherly kind yes that God has spoke to us in his plan for the world and for our personal life.

God's two kinds of divine action in divine providence

Father Kentenich continues: *Faith in divine providence involves two kinds of divine actions. The first is the act of the intellect. In human terms: his intellect proposes the script; God makes an outline for my life and all world events. His second action (although in God these two actions are really one and the same) is an act of the will, his execution of his plan. Let me ask you: Can you really say, fully convinced: Come what may, God has planned my life from all eternity? [If you can,] see how much warmth and freedom this gives you inside!*

Thought question: Am I convinced that God has a plan for my life from all eternity?

The heavenly Father's plan for my life

Father Kentenich gives an example: *I know a simple sister, who works in the missions and totally lives the idea of divine providence. In everything that happened, her first thought was always: "Come what may, the heavenly Father has the plan of my life [that is] finished and etched in his heart. The Blessed Mother keeps this plan in her little shrine and folds her hands and prays. I must only say yes to it. This is the wisdom of life, the art of living, the mastery of life! I think that whoever shapes life with the help of a few such deep thoughts is of greater significance than someone whose head is filled with scientific [knowledge]. Ask yourselves: What must my task be? To simply say yes! Saying **no** can be the worst thing I ever do. If I can only say yes, then everything will be all right.*

Thought question: How does the simple yes to God's plan help the sister in the mission?

Daring yes to begin again after failing

Father Kentenich gives an insight from St. Francis de Sales, one of his favorite saints: *But you will argue: I have done really stupid things! Such stupidity is also part of God's plan; not because he makes me do stupid things, but because I do them. In this context let me add a saying of St. Francis de Sales: The Father knows his child and knows that his child is small. He knows that I can only take baby steps, and that I will often fall. God expects our mistakes. The worst thing would be to stay on the ground and refuse to say yes. If I say my daring yes everything will be all right; then I can get up and keep going.*

Thought question: How can a daring yes help us start again when we have failed?

Receive all from the loving hands of the heavenly Father

Father Kentenich uses the following serious words: *Sculptor God, go to work, I am your block of marble! Or better yet: Sculptor God, go to work, I am your child! This is a different way to portray the biblical image that the Father trims the vine so that it bears much fruit (Jn 15:2). Think of your personal difficulties, of the difficulties of your family and of the Church! The Father certainly has a definite plan, otherwise he would not trim his vine this way. But come what may: The father is at the helm! I am not sticking my head in the sand when I say that—quite the opposite! I suffer with the Church and want things to be different, but I calmly go my way and speak my Ita, Pater [Yes, Father]. This Ita Pater must be enlightened and loving. I must receive all things from the loving hand of my heavenly Father.*

Thought question: How does the heavenly Father trim the vine in my life or the life of the Church and world so that it bears rich fruit?

A fatherly personal yes

Father Kentenich goes on to explain the second fatherly kind yes: *Secondly, the yes of the heavenly Father is also paternal in the sense of being personal. I stress this point so much because we need it so much. How much this sheds light [upon us] when we consider the word fatherly—both from the standpoint of the yes coming from the Father and coming to us.*

From the person of the Father

In German, there are two words for **you**: the formal *Sie* which is used for adults and shows politeness and respect. The familiar form of *Du* is used for your family, certain close friends, and children. In English we have only one word for both: **you**. Father Kentenich is coming from the perspective of the German language where the *Du* (familiar you used when speaking with a close friend or family member) is what we want to use with God. When the word **It** is used then our love for God is seen more as a love of a cold object not a personal warm love. Father Kentenich continues: *Who speaks the yes? The personal Father. It is so important that we say to ourselves: The Father is not an IT, he is a YOU! My love for the Father must therefore not be an It-love, but a You-love. When we love, we as men have a tragically high level of It-love. For not a few of us, the practical result of the retreat will be that we learn to speak to God as a person... For all practical purposes, many of us live as if...we think that God created everything, but now he is taking it easy in heaven and could care less about the further unfolding of the world. This is not our yes. Nor is it the worship of our nature worship... [which] embraces materialism. This is not our yes. We speak out in plain and genuine terms: Our yes is a personal yes!*

Thought question: In my personal prayer with God, is he someone I address as a personal you or is God more of an object (It) to me as a being the submits to my wish and will?

From the Father to us

Father Kentenich then turns to show how God speaks his fatherly us to me in my personal life: *God speaks his personal yes to me as an individual. God loves me personally. I don't believe you really believe what I mean with [the term] living faith. If we were truly convinced that God loves us personally...as St. Paul says: Dilixit me...He loved me! (Gal 2:20) we would see how quickly that would completely change our lives! Because we direct our prayer only to an It, we think that God views us the same way. We think that his love is It-love—love for a thing—but not You-love. We remain totally estranged from the fact that God loves us as persons. Think of the passages where Scripture tries to make clear to us not only that he loves us personally, but that he loves us as the apple of his eye! (cf Dt 32,10; Ps 17,8) If my yes is to be enlightened, I must hear the personal fatherly yes of the heavenly Father. Try to give this some serious thought...*

Thought question: Why is it important to experience God's yes as a personal yes to me as a person?

Three levels of divine providence

Father Kentenich returns to the subject of three levels of divine providence: *Sound Catholic theology speaks of three levels of faith in Divine Providence. We believe in God's general (generalis), special (specialis), and most special (specialissima) providence.*

General Providence

The book of Wisdom says: But your providence, O Father, guides the universe (Wis 14:3). What stands behind this? The fact that God, in his goodness, power and faithfulness, leads all things to their appointed end—the birds of the air, the plants, the lilies in the field... That is general divine providence. Am I affected by this general working of providence? By all means! But it goes even further: in my person I am also the object of the heavenly Father's special love.

Thought question: How do I experience God's general providence in my life?

-to be continued in Part Four-

