

## HUNGER FOR GOD

### I

**Not to be a saint** – that is the greatest tragedy that can befall a Catholic. And yet behold our days and our times! How many of us today seek sanctity?

Why, we are almost ashamed to speak of it, let alone try to achieve it. Somehow along the road of centuries we have lost sight of our final goal, and have become busy about “many things,” none of which has to do with sanctity. Somewhere, somehow, too, we have confused sanctity with drabness, suppressions, quirks, fixations, something unhealthy that does not belong to this century of science, fresh air, sun bathing, and worship of bodily beauty, comforts, and health.

Yet sanctity is so simple – as all things pertaining to God must be. For simplicity is the essence of love – and **sanctity is but love, lived fully, utterly, completely.**

Nor is there anything “sissified” about sanctity – or anything gloomy either. Saints can’t be sad, for saints are lovers of Love, and hence full of joy, of laughter, of gaiety. Theirs is a life of such adventure that it out adventures all the greatest adventures of sinful men. Their lives are rooted in God – and anyone who makes his or her life a constant date with Christ, lives a glorious adventure that spans earth and heaven.

**That we may serve Him without fear, in holiness and in justice all our days** – that is **sanctity**. Saints have no fears. How could they have? Their hearts are rooted in His Sacred Heart. They are reflections of His infinite love. They know the quality of His mercy, and so walk in hope, in love, in faith. All things come together for them, and of all they make use, to prove that love for Him which burns in their hearts like an all-consuming fire.

We were created to be saints, to enjoy the Beatific Vision. To enter into heaven, **we must be saints**; whether now, or later through much suffering and pain in purgatory. Why delay? Why not start now?

Sanctity does not imply only fasting, only penance. It does mean **much loving**. That is what we have been created for, to love – to love or neighbor and, through him, God.

Loving is fun. Loving is joy. Loving is peace. Loving means serving. Loving means forgetting self for others. Learn how to love, and all the rest will be added unto you.

We need **saints** today. If St. Francis of Assisi had an atomic bomb, would anyone worry about it? No. Because, being a saint, he loved much, and where love is there cannot be fear or evil.

We are almost beside ourselves with fears about A-bombs, H- bombs, Communism, cold and hot wars. Our heads cannot rest anywhere, nor our hearts, nor our souls. Vainly we seek answers – in armaments, in treaties, in tightening laws – knowing, even while we do all this, that we are shadowboxing because there is nothing we can do to prevent annihilation from the weapons our own brains have invented.

Nothing can save us except sanctity. What we need today is saints. Hundreds – thousands – millions of saints. All fears vanish like mist in the sun – before saints – before men and women in love with God.

Ah, we do need **saints** today! We need understanding, too, to realize that the greatest tragedy that can befall us is not to be saints.

### II

Hunger is filling the land – hunger for God. It is as if mankind were once more singing with David, “*Open Thou mine eyes and I will consider the wondrous things of Thy law.... Strengthen Thou me in Thy words.... Make me understand the ways of Thy justifications, and I shall be exercised in Thy wondrous works.*”

On all sides men are searching for truth. Books by Trappists, nuns, and other religious are avidly read. Overnight some become best sellers in the hands of astonished publishers who thought that men were interested only in the flesh and its sins!

**Chapter Four “Hunger For God”, pp. 59-73. Reprinted With Permission of Madonna House Publications, by Fr. 1 Gilles A. Surprenant, MH Associate Priest (1992) – St. Thomas à Becket Parish – Archdiocese of Montréal**

*Where Love Is, God Is – by Catherine Doherty – Madonna House Apostolate – 1953*

Secular universities teach Catholic Philosophy, and Scholasticism is again the rage. Saints are popular with sinners, and many men read St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, those masters of Catholic Mysticism, with renewed and burning interest.

Converts of note, as well as ordinary folks, knock loudly at the Church's door. But *are we ready* for this mounting hunger? For this search for truth? Or are we still thinking the thoughts of a dead century?

Have we remembered not to forget that our holy Faith is of eternity, not time; and that everywhere, always, it has been and ever will have to be, the answer to men's search for the One God, for truth, for life everlasting? Are we, the Catholics of this century, ready to end successfully this ever-intensifying quest, to sate this ever-growing hunger?

Men especially dedicated to God and to expounding His truths are always ready, and always eager and waiting, to impart it to those who *come to them*. But, are they ready to go into the market place, to preach it there, even as Christ did? Perhaps not all can. A few, specially trained, should.

Above all, we, the Catholic laity, should remember that we are the hands, the feet, the eyes, and the ears of the priests. It is of the very essence of being lay people also to be Apostles of Christ. We are of a kingly race, a priestly people. We have been "ordained" into the Royal Priesthood of Christ in our own fashion.

*We live in the market place, and in it have our being, that same market place where today men hungry for God gather, hoping even for crumbs.*

It falls on us, therefore, to see to it that we are ready to lead the hungry to the Banquet of Christ, where they shall be filled. But more than that, we must show the face of Christ, the face of truth, to them in our lives. Simply, directly, without any false humility or modesty, we must ourselves strive to become saints, so that others, in search of happiness and the peace of God, may see His face not only in books about dead saints, but in our faces, the faces of modern Catholics, living-saints-in-the-making!

The Living Word must take flesh now in us. We must examine our collective consciences and, with a loud *mea culpa* for all our sins of omission and commission, begin a new and apostolic life; a life that will become, must become a lamp to the world's feet, guiding it into the arms of God, through the hands of men specially ordained by *Him*, men who hold the keys to our Father's House.

We must go to work. For in this crumbling, unsettled world, men see but one stable, eternal center, the Church of Rome, whose children we are. We hold in our sinful hands the light of the world. If we do not lift it high, so all can see it and be comforted – God pity us!

In order to hold the light, our hands must be empty of all other things. Not for us, then the fleshpots of modern Egypt, nor the handling of worldly honors of fortune.

We who are the Children of Light must seek first the Kingdom of God, knowing that all the rest will be added to us. When we do as we should, the world will follow us, even to Calvary, where it will be washed in the Precious Blood of Christ.

### III

The hunger of men for God is frightening. It is like a sea. First it laps gently at the feet. Soon it mounts, with the tide, threatening to engulf and drown one.

The hunger of men for God is infinite. Thousands, nay millions, must have arisen in these days, and started out in search of Him that their hunger may be sated. And yet, there is that terrible question: "*Why is this hunger not sated? Why is mankind not being filled? Why is the tide growing and growing and not being led into the only channel of truth existing – the Catholic Church?*"

Is it because the chasm between ordinary men and women and the clergy has become so deep as to be unbridgeable? The popes speak of this, urging their priests to "go to the poor."

*Where Love Is, God Is – by Catherine Doherty – Madonna House Apostolate – 1953*

Or is it because there aren't enough priests, and those we have must be busy about so many other things that they have little time to serve this hunger?

Or is this indeed the century of the laity, who have been called again and again by the Holy See to live up to their apostolicity, their specific participation in the Royal Priesthood of Christ? If so, it is becoming painfully evident that few have answered the call.

Unless Catholics, lay and clerical, wake up, the feet of the seekers will falter in despair, and the tide of hunger will channel itself into the dark marshes of the kingdom of hell. Nature, and super nature, abhor a vacuum.

Emptiness must be filled. If truth fails to fill the void of men's souls, lies will.

There is only one other answer than the truth of God, one other complete synthesized philosophy that men will turn to. That is Communism. It must never be forgotten that Satan is the greatest intellect existing after God; and that he is quite capable of presenting men with such a seemingly complete answer that their minds, weary with search, will embrace it for lack of being directed to the absolute Good which is God.

How can we be so blind, we Catholics, who know the fullness of Truth? How can we fail to feed the hungry hearts, and assuage the thirsty souls, we who well know that on doing so, or not doing so, depends our own eternal salvation or our everlasting torment?

We shall not be able to marshal any excuses before God ... for well we know that when we turn men away from our doors, hungry... we turn away Christ.

I turned you from my door today    Your step was slow.    Almost relenting, hesitant.    I watched you go.  
I turned HIM from my heart today    He was with you.    The voice within me was so small    and yet...  
I knew.

If Christ says to you, or me, "I was hungry for the truth, and you fed Me not," what answer shall we give?

#### IV

Do we wish to face it or not, there is about our generation a terrible sterility.

We seem to have lost much of the sense of beauty, and the appreciation of it, that used to be part and parcel of the lives of our ancestors when they knew God and made Him part of their daily existence.

Our modern tortured paintings and writings show this vividly.

Gone, too, is the zest of living that characterized past generations. We barely manage to exist from day to day. We have become sophisticated, bored. We are accustomed to accept the new marvels of science and industry as part of our pattern of daily life – almost as our due! There is no enthusiasm in us. We have no great expectations. We are intensely dull.

We are too tired to create even our own amusements. We are but passive watchers of others who perform for us not for the love of sport, it seems, but for the gold sport brings the sportsman. Sportsman! The name is but a hollow-sounding travesty of what it used to mean.

Shallow have become our hearts. So shallow that they are barely stirred to pity, sorrow, or love. Casually, carelessly, without deep interest, we scan hair-raising stories of concentration camps, tortures, and deaths the world over, remembering what we have read not more than a minute after we have laid down the newspaper in which we read it.

Gray are our days, and spent monotonously and mechanically in the pursuit of a happiness that eludes us, a peace that hides from us. We bestir ourselves only to erect an idol here, another there. We tire of idols. We do not even bother to smash them. We just go on to something else, or someone else – to another god, another feeble adoration, another bored apostasy.

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We live as if we were blind. We live as if we were deaf. If the fullness of truth be told, *we do not live at all*. We are dead – or nearly dead.

Most of this has happened to us because we have forgotten the virtue of *gratitude*. Gratitude to God for our very existence – for the breath we draw this moment and the next, for all we have, and all we are, and all we hope to be.

Gratitude presupposes that we know our utter poverty; know that without God we are as nothing. Knowing this, in a wholesome fear of *Him*, we should prostrate ourselves in worship of Him, and in thanks to Him from whom we draw life.

Knowledge of our utter destitution, and the wholesome fear of God, would bring to our barren hearts a rich flow of grace and love, which would make us whole again, and fruitful in His sight.

Gratitude would come to dwell in us. Then life would be full of zest. The grayness would go out of it, to be replaced with such a glorious sense of adventure that our days would be even as a song. Our daily work would glow with life's sheen. Our daily lives would reflect God's beauty. All things would come together in us to praise the Lord.

Rich would be the fruits of gratitude. Our paintings would cease to torture, and begin to heal. Our books would bear witness to Love's walking once again in our midst. The sense of the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God would be restored. And we would begin to busy ourselves on behalf of our brothers in Christ.

In the mighty stirrings of our hearts we would find the peace and the happiness we so vainly seek now. The earth would be renewed, and restored to Christ, to whom it belongs.

Yes, all these things would happen if the virtue of gratitude would once more blossom in our desiccated bosoms. But before it can take root, we must turn our hearts away from all created things, and lift them up to God.

It is so simple a solution to our deadening days. Why don't we do it?

V

How dark and sad is our world today! How desolate. It is hard to behold the bitter fruits of our own planting. How clear is the dark road mankind has traveled! Strange that darkness can be so clear!

Four hundred years ago man began to make ready for the abomination of desolation in which we live today.

Four hundred years ago! Then, again listening to the serpent's whisper, man, turning his back on God and His truths, set forth in search of a knowledge that would make him equal to God.

High into the sky man thrust the altar of his new deity, science. This man-made idol was going to give him all power, all knowledge!

With giant strides man walked the wilderness of his own choosing, unmindful of the thorns, unfearful of the darkness, unconscious of his loss. He saw himself a conqueror of earth and heaven and all that lies beyond and in between.

Thus he began walking the "dark road," thus he began planting the seeds of the bitter fruits of today. And now, the end is here. The end of the unholy and unlawful search. That end, an abyss of destruction, the age of doom. Science, the false god, has given into man's hands the tools of his own annihilation, atomic energy.

Beside this awesome tool, man beholds, too, the rest of the dreadful fruits. For his tired hands hold nothing except fear, incredulity, insecurity, frustration, darkness, emptiness, and war.

The sight of a hell of his own creation is in his eyes. He cannot avert it. He cannot help himself. He trusts no one. How can one trust who has lost his faith?

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The sight of hell and death. Both damnation and death shed light, a strange, fearful light that brings out the darkness, as a back curtain brings out the stage and all that is on it.

In this light of hell, man now can see the road he traveled so swiftly, so sure of himself. He can see, and shudder, and cover his face in horror.

*Quo vadis* now, poor creature? Whither goest thou from here?

There are only two directions – one straight ahead into the abyss that yawns before your feet. Down, down, into the fires of atomic blasts – into dissolution of earth and man – into hell everlasting that awaits all those who turn their backs on the *one eternal God*, and worship gods of their own making.

Or, there is the complete about-face. And a pause in which together courage and strength, a pause *on your knees*, with your face in the dust – then a journey *back to the God who dwells in your soul*. A journey of atonement, penance, love. A journey whose every step will raise a cry of thanks for God’s mercy, and a plan for His complete forgiveness.

There still is a little time left to undertake this journey. But we must start now.

Man must go back to God or perish. *Quo vadis?*

VI

*“For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.”*

Thus speaks the holy Psalmist of the Lord.

Why shouldn’t we adopt his words for our own, we who fear all evils? Fears of all kinds have become our constant companions. Fear of the future. Fear of illness and loss of security. Fear that merges with human respect, of neighbors and what they may say. Fear of being in any way different from the “herd.” Fears of and for our tomorrows and of and for our yesterdays and today’s. Even the fear of ultimate salvation.

We walk the earth in fear!

Yet a Catholic, baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, should be the most fearless person on earth. He should forever walk in glory. When he is in a state of grace, the Most Holy Trinity dwells in him. Christ said so. And where the Trinity is, there is Our Lady of the Trinity, Mary the Mother of Christ. Also, not far off, is one’s patron saint and, of course, one’s guardian angel.

In such glorious company, what is there to be afraid of? Where are the dangerous places that one must stay away from, especially when justice or charity calls us to them?

What does it matter what anyone thinks of us, if God is pleased enough with us to come and stay in our hearts? Strange and incomprehensible at times are the ways of the children of light, who allow senseless fears to keep them from living a full life in Christ.

Here is a young couple afraid of public opinion. Desiring to impress men – not God – they rent a house at a “swanky” address, instead of living simply and joyously in a poorer one. They mortgage their future, their happiness, their harmonious family life for that fear of “what will people say or think?”

Here is another couple. Afraid of the insecurity of the future, they skimp and save every penny they can, forgetful of the need of their brothers in Christ, and of their own enjoyments. In doing so, they narrow their glorious lives as Catholics to miserliness and fear.

Here are people who won’t go near any poor section of their city, any “slums” it may possess, because bodily harm might come to them. They close their doors to Christ in a beggar, for the same reasons! How strange, how stupid for those born in the glory of the same Christ.

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Look at this youth, this girl who feels she must conform to the dress, make-up, and coiffure of the moment, or be out of the swim. Swim of what? Of the world's backwash?

Fear of illness or death has made men and women insane. Why? Don't they realize that both are precious gifts of Christ the Lord? Sickness makes one into His likeness, even as all pain and sorrow does, and brings unheard of and untasted depths of spiritual peace and understanding that cannot be reached any other way. Death? Death is Christ calling a soul for an eternal rendezvous of Love.

Oh, the joy of it – at long last – home – into the arms of the Beloved!

The only wholesome true fear that should be ours, sharing our nights and days, is *fear of sin*, for sin alone can destroy us forever. All other fears are as chaff in the wind that every Catholic should put speedily out of his life. Then he, too, may sing with the Psalmist:

*“The Lord ruleth me... and I shall want nothing.... He has set me in a place of pasture.... He hath brought me to the waters of refreshment.... Alleluia!”*

## VII

Christmas. The familiar story – a stable, a manger, a Baby, a Virgin Mother, shepherds, carols, presents, Christmas trees, good will to all men.

Do we ever stop to consider the utter desolation of that birth? The loneliness of it? The startling pain of the man who became the Foster-Father of God? The wound of a deeper pain, that lay heavy and hidden in the heart of Miriam the Virgin Mother?

Was this the welcome of the Messiah, awaited by the world? Was this to be the pattern of infinite years, this utter rejection by His creatures of both Himself and His love?

His birth was the beginning of His passion. The wood of the manger was the precursor of the wood of the cross.

Was the sea of love, the essence of this little Baby, poured out in vain? Was His warm and healing smile lost, wasted, on a cold indifferent world, that would reject its very Source, and, anew with every generation, crucify It with cruel mockery and wanton jest?

It seems like it. Does it not?

Behold our century, nearly two thousand years removed from the moment of the birth of Christ! Behold our cold hearts, our empty souls, our days spent in the worship of self, in worrying only about the altars of those hideous idols we have created out of our own substance. Legion is their name. To mention but a few – security, power, wealth, health, beauty of body. These idols, our own distorted images, are what we really worship.

Babe of Bethlehem, have mercy on us! Send Your angels to call us to Your feet. Send us Your graces, to open our blind eyes, so that, prostrating ourselves before Your utter destitution, we may find in its infinite richness a laver of our sins.

Cleansed by Your divine Presence, we may bring You, this Christmas day, or the next, the gift of self. Strip us naked of it, and fill us with Your love, making us strong with Your strength.

Help us to become as little children, who alone shall enter heaven. As little children we shall see easily through the tinsel of wealth, power, security. And we shall reject all of them for Your sake, embracing but one thing, desiring but one thing, living but one thing – *Your love*.

Sear us with the sparks of Your fire. We can then indeed bring the true message of Your birth to a world that has forgotten its very meaning, and thus restore it, and all that dwell therein, to Your Father in heaven who so loved us as to send You to redeem us.