

# A String of Spiritual Jewels

by Louis of Blois (1566)

## CHAPTER I.

### THE IMMENSE MERCY OF GOD, AND THE BENIGNITY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD TOWARDS SINNERS, DEMONSTRATED BY VARIOUS REVELATIONS.

**T**HE divine Dionysius the Areopagite, in the Epistle which he wrote to Demophilus, pointing out how great is the goodness and clemency of God towards sinners, and how much our good Lord desires their salvation, relates a beautiful vision shown to St. Carpus, a Bishop to whom many things were divinely revealed, which was narrated to him by Carpus himself. A certain infidel having led away a Christian from the faith of the Church, Carpus, who ought to have had compassion on them both, and to have most pitifully prayed for them, conceived an inordinate anger and bitterness against both of them. Wherefore he prayed to God to end their lives at once; not being able to endure that impious men who perverted the right ways of the Lord, should be allowed to live. And, behold, looking up, he saw the heavens opened, and Jesus sitting on a throne, with innumerable Angels standing round Him. But, when he turned his eyes downwards, he beheld a deep abyss, in which were a multitude of serpents. At the mouth of this abyss, as it were on the slippery edge, stood the two men, on whom he had wished to bring evil, trembling and exceedingly miserable. And, when he was angry that they were not instantly swallowed up, looking up again to heaven, he saw the most merciful Jesus, moved with pity, arise from His heavenly seat, and descending, stretch forth to them His most benignant Hand, the Angels at the same time assisting them. Then the Lord Jesus, turning to Carpus, said, "I am ready, Carpus, to suffer again for the salvation of these men; and it would be pleasing to Me, provided other men would not therefrom take occasion to sin. Do thou consider whether it would be well for thee to prefer that dwelling full of serpents to the company of God. and his good and merciful Angels."

The blessed Dionysius adds these words; "These are the things which I heard, and I believe them to be true."

Gertrude, or Trutha, a holy virgin most dear to God, was once divinely taught that one who is considering in his heart the image of the Crucified, ought to think he hears Jesus Christ Himself saying to him, with a gentle voice, "Behold, thou seest how for love of thee I hung upon the cross, naked, despised, My whole Body wounded, and every limb stretched. And My Heart is still full of such sweetness of love towards thee, that, if it were expedient for thy salvation, and thou couldst not otherwise attain to eternal bliss, I would suffer for thee alone all that I suffered for the whole world."

St. Bridget in spirit heard Christ speak thus: "I am perfect love, for all things that I have done from eternity, I did out of love; and, whatever I do or shall do

in future, likewise proceeds and will proceed from my love. My love for man is now as great and incomprehensible as it was at the time of my Passion, when, out of exceeding love, I delivered all the elect by my Death. And, if it were possible for me to die as many times as there are souls in hell, I would with most prompt will and most perfect charity give up my Body, and would endure for each soul the same Passion and Death that I endured for all.”

Thus spoke Christ. Behold how tenderly and ardently God loves the rational soul, and how vehemently He desires that every man should attain to heavenly bliss. But the Lord created man noble, to His own image and likeness, giving him reason and liberty of choice, and freedom of will, so that, if he chose to obey and serve God, he might receive an eternal reward in heaven; but, if he would not, he should undergo never-ending punishment in hell. And this is justice. If, however, any one who has contemned and disobeyed God by sin, should, out of love, return to God by true repentance, he shall be accepted by God, and shall not perish, however many and grievous may have been his sins, provided he perseveres in well-doing. And this is mercy.

Once, when the holy virgin Gertrude was considering within herself, which of those things that she had learnt from the Lord, it would be most useful to make known to men, the Lord thus answered her thoughts; “It would be most useful that men should know and ever bear in mind, that I, the Son of the Virgin, stand before God the Father, for their salvation; and, whenever they sin in their hearts through human frailty, I offer My immaculate Heart to God the Father to make amends for them; and, when they offend by deeds, I show Him my pierced Hands; and thus, in whatsoever way they sin, I pacify the Father by my innocence, in such wise, that being penitent, they may ever obtain a ready pardon of their sins.

The holy virgin Mechtildis was praying for a certain man, and, being indignant because he remained incorrigible, the Lord said to her, “Condole with Me, O My chosen one, and pray for the miserable sinners, whom I bought at so great a price, and for whom I wait so patiently, desiring earnestly that they should be converted to Me. Behold, as I once offered Myself a sacrifice on the altar of the cross, so do I now, with the same love, stand before God the Father, on behalf of sinners; because it is My greatest desire that the sinner should turn to Me by true repentance, and live.”

Again, the Lord said to the same holy virgin Mechtildis, concerning another pious person: “When he has committed any fault from human infirmity, if he presently returns to Me by penance, trusting in My mercy, I am ready, for one sigh, to remit his every fault.”

St. Gertrude once understood from the Lord, that if any one, quickly repenting of all his sins of omission and commission, gives himself with his whole heart to obey the precepts of God, he is as truly sanctified and cleansed before God, as was that leper who said, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,” and to whom the Lord answered, “I will. Be thou cleansed” (St. Luke, 5:13).

Jesus Christ said to St. Bridget, “Be then steadfast and humble. Be not elated in thy own mind, when I make known to thee the dangers of others, and divulge not their names, unless thou be commanded to do so. For I do this not to their confusion, but that they may be converted, and acknowledge the justice and mercy of God. Nor shouldst thou fly from them, as if they were already judged and condemned; because, if he who is now most wicked, should call upon Me with contrition, and with the will to amend, I am ready at once to pardon him. And, on account of his true contrition, I call him to-day most dear, whom yesterday I called most wicked; and, if his contrition be perfect and steadfast, I remit not only the sin, but also the punishment due to it.”

Our Lord said to St. Mechtildis, “There is no sinner so wicked, but that, if he truly repents, I will instantly grant him full remission of all his sins, and rest My Heart upon him with as much clemency and sweetness, as if he had never sinned.” O unspeakable goodness of God!

Wherefore (as one of the Saints writes), if any one should deny that God is ready to remit the sins of the truly penitent, even as often as there are moments in time, he would set about despoiling God of great glory.

Again, our Lord said to the same virgin Mechtildis; “Although the stars, that is, the souls of My elect, may sometimes be greatly darkened by the clouds of sin, and the night of ignorance, yet they cannot be obscured in their firmament, that is, in My divine light. Though My elect, I say, may often be involved in great sins, yet I always regard them with the same love by which I chose them, and I wait for them in that glory to which they will at length attain. It is, therefore, good for man to reflect often with what gratuitous goodness I have chosen him, and how I have thought mercifully of him, and lovingly regarded him, even while he lay in his sins; and, also, how benignantly I have rendered him good for evil.” Oh, the depth of the inscrutable wisdom and mercy of God, who endeavors in so many and such marvelous ways to recall and attract to himself the heart of the sinner, leaving him no ground for despair!

When the holy virgin Gertrude had heard in a sermon that no one could be saved who had not at least so much true charity as to repent and abstain from sin for the love of God; she reflected within herself that many pass out of this life who seem to repent rather from fear of hell than from love of God. “While she was turning over these things in her mind, our Lord answered her thus: “When I see those in their agony, who have ever remembered Me with affection, or have done any meritorious work, I manifest Myself to them with so sweet and gentle an aspect, that they grieve from their inmost hearts for having ever offended Me; and being by this repentance rendered capable of obtaining salvation, they cannot perish.”

The blessed Mechtildis was once considering how immense was the loving-kindness of God, when our Lord said to her: “Come, and contemplate the least of all the blessed who are in heaven; for in him thou wilt be able to understand My loving kindness.” And while Mechtildis was considering

attentively, and longing to know who it was of whom the Lord was speaking; behold there appeared to her a man of royal aspect and dignity, in the flower of his age, with a beautiful, resplendent, and most amiable countenance; to whom she said, "Who art thou? and how didst thou attain to so great happiness and glory?" He answered, "On the earth I was a robber and a malefactor; but, because my evil deeds were done rather from ignorance and the habits in which I was trained by my parents, than out of wickedness, I at last through repentance obtained mercy. But I remained a hundred years in the place of punishment, and endured many torments, that I might be purified; and now, by the sole gratuitous goodness of God, I have been brought hither into rest." In this manner St. Mechtildis learnt the loving-kindness of God towards him who was the least of all the blessed. And if our most merciful Lord granted so much to one who had led so bad a life, what will He give to those who live in justice and holiness?

God spoke thus to the holy virgin, St. Catherine of Siena: "Those sinners who, in the extremity of death, despair of My mercy, offend Me more deeply, and displease Me more by that one sin, than by all the iniquities that they have ever committed. For he who despairs, openly despises My mercy, and perversely imagines his wickedness to be greater than My mercy and goodness. Whence, being held captive by this sin, he grieves not for his offense against Me, but for his own irremediable damnation. But if he truly grieved for having offended and contemned Me, and faithfully hoped in My mercy, he would most certainly find it; since My mercy is infinitely greater than all the sins which ever were or ever can be committed by any creature."

It is not, however, sufficient to grieve for sins; it is also necessary to confess them sacramentally before a priest, unless this confession be really impossible. Hence, the Lord Jesus said to St. Bridget: "No one is so great a sinner that I would refuse him mercy, if he sought it with a humble and perfect heart. Therefore, let sinners who wish to be reconciled to Me, and to obtain My grace and friendship, first, grieve with their whole hearts that they have offended Me, their Creator and Redeemer; then, let them purify themselves before the priest by a sincere and humble confession, and amend their lives, and perform satisfaction according to the advice and discretion of the priest. If they have done this, I will draw near to them, and the devil will be kept at a distance from them. Afterwards, it will be fitting that they should receive My Body with devotion and true love, resolving never more to fall into their former sins, and purposing to persevere to the end in well-doing. These I will run to meet as a mother runs to meet her erring children, and will most gladly receive them. I will be in them, and they shall be in Me, and shall live and rejoice with Me to all eternity."

When St. Bridget out of compassion was praying for a certain powerful nobleman of renown in the world, who was dangerously ill, and yet would not confess his sins to a priest after the manner of the faithful; Jesus Christ, appearing to her, said, "Tell thy confessor to visit that sick person, and to hear his confession." The priest, being sent by St. Bridget, visited the sick man; but

he answered that he had often made his confession, and that it was not now necessary. The following day, by the command of Christ, the priest was again sent to him, and received the same answer as before. But the third day, returning to the sick man, he declared to him the things which would hinder his being saved, which our Lord had revealed to St. Bridget. Then he, dissolved in tears, said to the priest, "And how can I possibly obtain pardon, who am laden with so many crimes?" The priest replied, "Even if thou hadst perpetrated many more and worse crimes, thou mightest yet be saved by true contrition and confession; this I faithfully promise thee." And he answered: "I despaired of the salvation of my soul, because I had utterly submitted and given myself up to the dominion of the devil, who has also frequently spoken to me. I am now sixty years old, and I have never made a sacramental confession, nor received the Body of Christ; but I now feel that I shed such tears as I never shed before." On that day, therefore, he confessed four times to the priest, and on the morrow after his confession he received the Holy Eucharist, and on the sixth day he died. Concerning him the Lord said afterwards to St. Bridget: "He went not down into hell, but reached purgatory, on account of his contrition and confession. He has obtained salvation through My goodness, whereby I wait even unto the last moment for the conversion of a sinner, and through the merits of My Mother, whose dolours he used to compassionate while he lived in the flesh, and he will be saved."

God the Father said to the virgin St. Catherine: "My goodness has granted to the glorious Mother of My only begotten Son, out of reverence for the Incarnate Word, that whoever has recourse to her with devout veneration, even though he be a sinner, shall in no wise become the prey of the infernal enemy. For she has been chosen and prepared by Me, and placed as a most sweet allurements to captivate men, and especially the souls of sinners."

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, herself said to St. Bridget, "However much a man may have sinned, if from the bottom of his heart he seeks me with true amendment and love, I am instantly ready to receive him. Nor do I consider how much he has sinned, but with what will and intention he returns to me. For I disdain not to touch, to anoint, and to heal the wounds of any sinner, let him be ever so vile and filthy; because I am called, and I truly am, the Mother of mercy."

Saint Gertrude once saw as it were little animals of various kinds running under the mantle of Mary, the most sweet Mother of God, by which were signified those sinners who have a special devotion to her. The Mother of mercy received them all benignantly, and, as it were, protecting them under her mantle, she patted and stroked each one, with her delicate hand, and kindly caressed them, as one caresses a favorite animal. And she thus plainly insinuated how mercifully she receives all who call upon her, and with what maternal kindness she defends all who hope in her, even those who are still entangled in sin, until she reconciles them, as true penitents, with her Son.

The devil once wishing to deceive the holy virgin St. Catherine, and to lead her into faintheartedness or despair, endeavored to persuade her that her life

was false, useless, and perverse. She, therefore, taught by the goodness of God, who never denies Himself to those who truly seek Him, humbly raised her mind to the divine mercy, saying: "I openly confess to my Creator, that I have daily been in darkness, and done evil; but yet I will confidently hide myself in the Wounds of my Lord Jesus Christ, and I will wash away the stains of all my iniquities in His Precious Blood, and will evermore rejoice with holy desire in Him my Creator and Redeemer." After these words, the devil immediately took to flight.

Christ said to St. Gertrude, "Any one may attain to the hope of pardon, how much soever he may feel himself oppressed by the heavy weight of his sins, by offering to God the Father My most innocent Passion and Death. Let the sinner, therefore, believe that by this he obtains the saving fruit of indulgence; because there is on earth no remedy against sin so efficacious as the devout remembrance of My Passion, with right faith and true repentance."

Thus we should, in prudence, consider not only the mercy, but also the justice of God; concerning which Christ frequently spoke very terrible words to St. Bridget. She once (by the will of God) heard the devils bearing witness to the truth, and saying to the Lord, "If that creature whom Thou most lovest, namely, the Virgin who bore Thee, and who never offended Thee, had committed mortal sin, and had died without divine contrition, she would never have reached heaven, but would be tormented with us in hell; so greatly dost Thou love justice."

Let no sinner, therefore, say to himself, I will now follow freely my own will and my pleasures, I will enjoy the delights and joys of this world, and afterwards I will amend at the end of my life; for the mercy of God is great and boundless; whenever I shall repent of my sins, the merciful Lord will receive me, and I shall be saved; meanwhile, I will do whatever pleases me. Let not the sinner speak thus, let him not act thus, let him not cast himself into danger; but let him without delay strive to amend his evil life, and if it be possible, confess his sins to a priest, and that sincerely and completely. For although God promises mercy to the penitent sinner, yet He promises not true repentance, nor a long life, to one who perseveres in sin. And it is certain that if a sinner who has offended God by his wickedness and crimes, should not repent and have true contrition before his soul is separated from the body, he will eternally perish, for the satisfaction of divine justice. O how many, seduced by the persuasions of the devil, perish and die in their iniquities! Wherefore it is sometimes said, in the Revelations of St. Bridget, that souls fall into hell, as snow falls upon the earth.

## CHAPTER II.

### ON DISCRETION AND PURITY OF INTENTION.

**T**HE illustrious virgin and martyr Agnes, appearing to St. Bridget, said to her, "My daughter, be steadfast; and neither draw back, nor advance beyond what is fitting. Thou shouldst not afflict thyself beyond thy strength, nor imitate others in good works above thy nature; for God has decreed from all eternity to open heaven to sinners by works of humility and love, and He wills that measure and discretion be observed in all things. But the devil in his envy often persuades an imperfect man to fast beyond his strength, or to take up exercises that he cannot bear, or to aim at what is too high for him. The crafty enemy does this in order that the man, continuing only through shame what he foolishly undertook, may the more quickly fail through weakness. Thou shouldst measure thyself in this matter according to thy strength or thy weakness; because some are by nature stronger, and others weaker, some are more fervent by the grace of God, others more diligent by habit.

"Rule thyself, and order thy life, according to the advice of those who fear God, and desire not to seem what thou art not, nor seek anxiously what is above thy strength. There are some who believe they will obtain heaven entirely by their own merits; and some who think they can by their own works adequately satisfy for the sins they have committed. But these are damnable errors; for if a man were to give up his body to death a hundred times, he could not answer to God for one in a thousand." Thus spoke blessed Agnes.

Christ said several times to St. Bridget, that satisfaction should be made by all our members, as they have all assented to sin. Let a man, therefore, with all diligence and humility correct himself, and neglect not to make all possible satisfaction to God (who, for a moderate penance rightly performed with good-will here, remits grievous punishments in the next world), restraining, for the love of God, his eyes from beholding evil and vanity, his ears from hearing hurtful and foolish things, his tongue from evil and idle words, his heart from pernicious and foolish thoughts and wicked desires, and his whole body from all that contaminates the mind. Let him abstain not only from unlawful things, but also with prudence from some things that are lawful. Let him studiously mortify in himself his own will and his vices; let him patiently bear all adversity, and devote himself to good works, to virtue and holy exercises. Let him, however, always trust rather in the satisfaction and merits of Jesus Christ than in his own works and merits; for one little drop of the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus is of more value than all human merits.

Christ spoke thus to the blessed Bridget: "Abstinence and continence, however slight, discreetly undertaken, and observed for My love and honour, will deserve from Me a great reward." And, assuredly, he who for the love of God prudently restrains himself, so that he sees, hears, smells, tastes, speaks, and touches nothing that is not necessary or useful, and who discreetly strives to overcome his own will and sensuality even in the least things, does what is more pleasing to God, than if he recalled many dead persons to life. Hence

the Fathers say as follows: "If two men, passing the same way, find a beautiful flower, and one of them wishes, indeed, to gather it, but, thinking better of it, leaves it for God's sake; and the other, without reflection, gathers the flower; the latter by gathering it in simplicity sins not, but the former by leaving the same flower for God's sake gains as much merit over him who gathers it as there is distance between heaven and earth. If, however, he who gathers the flower gathers it purely to the praise of God, he also acquires great merit." In the same way, he who fittingly abstains from food for God's sake is greatly pleasing to God, and he who fittingly eats to the honour of God, is also pleasing to God.

The blessed Gertrude heard from our Lord that she showed her exceeding love of Him when she offered in His praise all her thoughts, words, looks, and actions. She understood, also, that, as often as anyone looks with devout intention on the image of Christ crucified, so often is he lovingly regarded by the most gracious mercy of God; and hence his soul, like a clear mirror, receives in itself from the divine love a most joyful image, which causes rejoicing in the whole court of heaven. And this will be to his eternal glory. She understood that if a person lifts a straw from the ground, or takes one step for the honor and love of God, it is pleasing to God and worthy of reward.

When the same virgin, St. Gertrude, once complained that she could not feel as much desire of God as she ought, she was divinely taught that it was amply sufficient in the sight of God, if a man wished to have a great desire, though he might feel little or no desire within himself; because he has before God as great a desire as he wishes to have, and God dwells in the heart containing such a desire (that is to say, the will to have the desire) more gladly than a man could dwell amid fresh and pleasant flowers.

Our Lord very often revealed to His most dear spouses, Gertrude, Bridget, Mechtildis, and Catherine, how acceptable it is to Him, and how profitable to man, to contemplate the Passion of Christ with pious, humble, and sincere attention and devotion, which they themselves were always most diligent in doing. For they engraved so deeply on their inmost hearts the Passion of the Lord Jesus, (which, though it was most bitter and cruel, is yet all full of the sweetness of love), and were accustomed to meditate upon it with such ardent and sweet affection, that it was to them honey to the taste, harmony to the ear, and joy to the heart.

The holy virgin Elizabeth of Spalbeeck also was accustomed daily to contemplate the Passion of our Lord with immense devotion. Whence the stigmata of His five Wounds were truly imprinted by Christ on her hands and feet, and her side, so that blood often copiously flowed from them, as if from recent wounds, more especially on Fridays. And this most pure virgin was seven times a day so rapt in God that no feeling, movement, or breath were perceptible in her: for her whole body became stiff, and no part of it could be moved without moving the whole. Let us, in imitation of these virgins, engrave on our hearts the Passion of the Lord Jesus, and sedulously give thanks for it.



Our Lord once instructed the blessed Gertrude by this simile: “Even as a powerful Emperor not only is pleased to have in his palace gentle and accomplished maidens, but also appoints and ordains princes, generals, and soldiers, and other ministers fitted for various labors, who may be always ready to attend to his affairs; so I also not only delight in the interior joys of those who, following My guidance, seek the quiet of divine contemplation, but I am, moreover, attracted to remain with the sons of men, when they undertake any useful work for My love and honour.”

Therefore, pure and frequent prayer does, indeed, greatly adorn the soul of him who has leisure to pray continually, and who has the grace of prayer: (for what is more honorable than to converse assiduously with the Heavenly King?) but, nevertheless, exterior works, rightly performed for God’s sake, also confer great grace on the faithful soul.

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Taken from *Spiritual Works of Louis of Blois* (1506—1566)

1. The Rule of the Spiritual Life.
  2. Spiritual Mirror.
  3. A String of Spiritual Jewels
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**Biographical Note.** FRANCIS LOUIS OF BLOIS, more commonly known by his Latin name, Ludovicus Blosius, was born in 1506, near Beaumont in Hainaut, of the noble house de Blois et de Chatillon.

He was sent by his parents to the court of Charles V., and passed his early youth there as page to the Emperor. At the age of fourteen he left it by his own choice, and entered the Benedictine Monastery of Liesse, near Avesnes in Hainaut, where he was remarkable for his wisdom and piety. In his twenty-fourth year he was chosen Abbot, and restored the ancient discipline of the Monastery, which soon acquired a great reputation for learning and virtue.

He frequently refused both the Archbishopric of Cambrai and the Abbey of Tournai, offered him by Charles V., whose almoner he had been, and led a holy and hidden life in his own community.

He composed many spiritual works, from which the treatises contained in the following pages have been translated. He died on the 7th of January, 1566, in the 60th year of his age.

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