

A selection from *Interior Freedom*, by Jacques Philippe.

Chapter II: The Present Moment (continued)
Part II of VIII

2. "TO LOVE" HAS A PRESENT TENSE ONLY

Treatises on spirituality speak of the stages of the spiritual life. They list three, seven, twelve, or whatever number the particular author prefers. There is much to be learned from these accounts, whether it is the seven mansions of the soul depicted by St. Teresa of Avila or the twelve degrees of humility of the Rule of St. Benedict.

But experience has taught me a different approach. I often say jokingly that the ladder of perfection has only one step: the step we take *today*. Without concerning ourselves about the past or the future, we can decide to believe today, place all our trust in God today, love God and neighbor today. Whether our good resolutions produce success or failure, the next day we can begin again, not relying on our strength but only on God's faithfulness.

This attitude is fundamental in the spiritual life. St. Paul describes it: "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus...Only let us hold true to what we have attained" (Philippians 3:13-16). It is a basic note of monastic spirituality. St. Anthony of Egypt (the Father of Monasticism, who died at the age of 105 and who, when he was 100, used to say, "I haven't yet begun to be converted!") would repeat St. Paul's words unceasingly. His biographer, St. Athanasius, adds: "He also remembered the words of Elijah: 'The Lord liveth before whom I stand today.' St. Anthony pointed out that when Elijah said 'today' he took no account of the past. And so, as though he were still at the beginning, every day he strove to live as he wished to appear before God: pure of heart and ready to obey God's will and no other" (St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Life of St. Anthony*, chapter 2). The same attitude has been practiced by all the saints, St. Therese of Lisieux being a shining example. She wrote: "To love thee, O Jesus, I have but today" (St. Therese of Lisieux, *Poesie* PN 5).

To come:

- *We can suffer for only one moment*
- *Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day*
- *Tomorrow can take care of itself*
- *Live, instead of waiting to live*
- *Availability to other people*
- *Psychological time and interior time*

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