

# Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

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## *Of Temptations, and the Difference Between Experiencing Them and Consenting to Them*

**By Saint Francis of Sales**

[From the book *Introduction to the Devout Life*]

Picture to yourself a young princess beloved of her husband, to whom some evil wretch should send a messenger to tempt her to infidelity. First, the messenger would bring forth his propositions. Secondly, the princess would either accept or reject

the overtures. Thirdly, she would consent to them or refuse them. Even so, when Satan, the world, and the flesh look upon a soul espoused to the Son of God, they set temptations and suggestions before that soul, whereby—1. Sin is proposed to it. 2. Which proposals are either pleasing or displeasing to the soul. 3. The soul either consents, or rejects them. In other words, the three downward

steps of temptation, delectation, and consent. And although the three steps may not always be so clearly defined as in this illustration, they are to be plainly traced in all great and serious sins.

If we should undergo the temptation to every sin whatsoever during our whole life, that would not damage us in the Sight of God's Majesty, provided we took no pleasure in it, and did not consent to it; and that because in temptation we do not act, we only suffer, and inasmuch as we take no delight in it, we can be liable to no

blame. S. Paul bore long time with temptations of the flesh, but so far from displeasing God thereby, He was glorified in them. The blessed Angela di Foligni underwent terrible carnal temptations, which move us to pity as we read of them. S. Francis and S. Benedict both experienced grievous temptations, so that the one cast himself amid thorns, the other into the snow, to quench them, but so far from losing anything of God's Grace thereby, they greatly increased it.

Be then very courageous amid temptation, and never imagine

### **Author: Saint Francis of Sales**

Francis de Sales was born in France in 1567 to a noble family. His father sent him to the best schools, and when he was 20 he decided to become a priest. Despite his wealthy background, Francis always thought it was more important to serve God than to have money or power. His father tried to persuade him to marry, but Francis was instead ordained at the age of 26.

He quickly earned a reputation for being a kind and understanding man and an excellent speaker who attracted people to the Catholic faith. Many people in his diocese, which was partly in France and partly in Switzerland, followed the teachings of John Calvin, since at one time the Catholic faith had been outlawed in the region. Francis won many of them back. He taught religion to children and helped prepare men to be ordained priests. He wrote several books and helped St. Jane Francis de Chantal to found a religious order of women, the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, in 1610.

Francis died in 1622 and was canonized in 1664 by Pope Alexander VII. He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1877. He is a patron of writers and journalists because he used his writing to teach people about the faith.

yourself conquered so long as it is displeasing to you, ever bearing in mind the difference between experiencing and consenting to temptation, - that difference being, that whereas they may be experienced while most displeasing to us, we can never consent to them without taking pleasure in them, inasmuch as pleasure felt in a temptation is

usually the first step towards consent. So let the enemies of our salvation spread as many snares and wiles in our way as they will, let them besiege the door of our heart perpetually, let them ply us with endless proposals to sin,—so long as we abide in our firm resolution to take no pleasure therein, we

cannot offend God any more than the husband of the princess in my illustration could be displeased with her because of the overtures made to her, so long as she was in no way gratified by them. Of course, there is one great difference between my imaginary princess and the soul,

namely, that the former has it in her power to drive away the messenger of evil and never hear him more, while the latter cannot always refuse to experience temptation, although it be always in its power to refuse consent. But how long soever the temptation may persist, it cannot harm us so long as it is unwelcome to us.

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But again, as to the pleasure which may be taken in temptation (technically called *d e l e c t a t i o n*), inasmuch as our souls have two parts, one inferior, the other superior, and the inferior does not always choose to be led by the superior, but takes its own line,—it

not unfrequently happens that the inferior part takes pleasure in a temptation not only without consent from, but absolutely in contradiction to the superior will. It is this contest which S. Paul describes when he speaks of the “law in my members, warring against the law of my mind,”

(Rom 7:23) and of the “flesh lusting against the spirit.” (Gal 5:17)

Have you ever watched a great burning furnace heaped up with ashes? Look at it some ten or twelve hours afterwards, and there will scarce be any living fire there, or only a little smouldering in the very heart thereof. Nevertheless, if you can find that tiny lingering spark, it will suffice to rekindle the extinguished flames. So it is with love, which is the true spiritual life amid our greatest, most active temptations.

Temptation, flinging its delectation into the inferior part of the soul, covers it wholly with ashes, and leaves but a little spark of God’s Love, which can be found nowhere save hidden far down in the heart or mind, and even that is hard to find. But nevertheless it is there, since however troubled we may have been in body and mind, we firmly resolved not to consent to sin or the temptation thereto, and that delectation of the exterior man

was rejected by the interior spirit. Thus though our will may have been thoroughly beset by the temptation, it was not conquered, and so we are certain that all such delectation was involuntary, and consequently not sinful.

**Two striking Illustrations of the same.**

This distinction, which is very important, is well illustrated by the description S. Jerome gives of a young man bound to a voluptuous bed by the softest silken cords, and subjected to the wiles and lures of a treacherous tempter, with the express object of causing him to fall. Greatly as all his senses and imagination must inevitably have been possessed by so vehement an assault,

he proved that his heart was free and his will unconquered, for, having physical control over no member save his tongue, he bit that off and spat

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it out at his foe, a foe more terrible than the tyrant's executioners.

S. Catherine of Sienna has left a somewhat similar record. The Evil One having obtained permission from God to assault that pious virgin with all his strength, so long as he laid no hand upon her, filled her heart with impure suggestions, and surrounded her with every conceivable temptation of sight and sound, which, penetrating into the Saint's heart, so filled it, that, as she herself has said, nothing remained free save her most acute superior will. This struggle endured long, until at length Our Lord appeared to her, and she exclaimed, "Where wert Thou, O most Dear Lord, when my heart was so overwhelmed with darkness and foulness?" Whereupon He answered, "I was within thy heart, My child." "How could that be, Lord," she

***I would warn you of this, my child, so that, should you ever be tried by great temptations, you may know that God is showing special favour to you, thereby proving that He means to exalt you in His Sight; but that at the same time you may ever be humble and full of holy fear, not overconfident in your power.***

asked, "when it was so full of evil? Canst Thou abide in a place so foul?" Then our Lord replied, "Tell Me, did these evil thoughts and imaginations give thee pain or pleasure? didst thou take delight, or didst thou grieve over them?" To which S. Catherine made answer, "They grieved me exceedingly." Then the Lord said, "Who, thinkest thou, was it that caused thee to be thus grieved, save I Myself, hidden within thy soul? Believe Me, My child, had I not been there, these evil thoughts which swarmed around thy soul, and which thou couldst not banish, would speedily have overpowered it, and entering in, thy free will would have accepted them, and so death had struck that soul; but inasmuch as I was there, I filled thy heart with reluctance and resistance, so that it set itself stedfastly against the temptation, and finding itself

unable to contend as vigorously as it desired, it did but experience a yet more vehement abhorrence of sin and of itself. Thus these very troubles became a great merit again to thee, and a great accession of virtue and strength to thy soul.”

Here, you see, were the embers covered over with ashes, while temptation and delectation had entered the heart and surrounded the will, which, aided only by the Saviour, resisted all evil inspirations with great disgust, and a persevering refusal to consent to sin. Verily the soul which loves God is sometimes in sore straits to know whether He abideth in it or no, and whether that Divine Love for which it fights is extinguished or burns yet. But it is the very essence of the perfection of that Heavenly Love to require its lovers to endure and fight for Love’s sake, without knowing even whether they possess the very Love for which and in which they strive.

### **Encouragement for the Tempted Soul.**

God never permits such grievous temptations and assaults to try any,

save those souls whom He designs to lead on to His own living, highest love, but nevertheless it does not follow as a natural consequence that they are certain to attain thereto. Indeed, it has often happened that those who had been steadfast under violent assaults, failing to correspond faithfully to Divine Grace, have yielded under the pressure of very trifling temptations. I would warn you of this, my child, so that, should you ever be tried by great temptations, you may know that God is showing special favour to you, thereby proving that He means to exalt you in His Sight; but that at the same time you may ever be humble and full of holy fear, not overconfident in your power to resist lesser temptations because you have overcome those that were greater, unless by means of a most steadfast faithfulness to God.

Come what may in the shape of temptation, attended by whatsoever of delectation,—so long as your will refuses consent, not merely to the temptation itself, but also to the delectation, you need have no fear,—God is not offended. When any one has swooned away,

and gives no sign of life, we put our hand to his heart, and if we find the slightest fluttering there, we conclude that he still lives, and that, with the help of stimulants and counter-irritants, we may restore consciousness and power. Even so, sometimes amid the violence of temptation the soul seems altogether to faint away, and to lose all spiritual life and action. But if you would be sure how it really is, put your hand on the heart. See whether heart and will yet have any spiritual motion; that is to

say, whether they fulfil their own special duty in refusing consent to and acceptance of temptation and its gratification; for so long as the power to refuse exists within the soul, we may be sure that Love, the life of the soul, is there, and that Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, is within, although, it may be, hidden; and that by means of steadfast perseverance in prayer, and the Sacraments, and confidence in God, strength will be restored, and the soul will live with a full and joyous life.



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